

















"TO THE CONSTERNATION OF ALL BEHOLDERS THE LITTLE HEIRESS OF OAKHURST WENT DOWN ON HER KNEES IN THE SNOW." (See page 110.)

# NAN NOBODY.

BY

MARY T. WAGGAMAN.



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# NAN NOBODY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### NAN AND HER NURSLING.

“NAN! Nan! O Nan! Ain’t you ’most ready, Nan?” The shrill, little, piping call came from the fence of the Farley cabin, where a small, ragged figure was perched, like a lame chicken in the sunshine. “Please hurry, Nan!”

“I am hurrying, Patsy,” was the cheery answer. “I’ll be ready in a minute. But I can’t leave the house in no such clutter as this.” And Nan, who was a small woman of twelve, caught up the stump of a broom and began to sweep away the crumbs and remnants of a midday meal, while she issued

orders to her assistant, a freckle-faced boy of eight:

“Throw away the potato-skins, Davy. I guess that bone can go to the dog, for there ain’t a picking on it now. Brush up the ashes and put in another stick of wood, and I’ll fill the kettle for tea.”

“There ain’t no tea,” answered Davy, grimly. “And there ain’t no sugar, neither. Milly she took the last fur lunch to-day. And Finnegan says we can’t have no more till Dad pays his bill. He owes him three dollars now.”

“Three dollars!” gasped the little house-keeper. “Three dollars! O Davy, what for?”

“Rum,” replied Davy, nodding. “He’s a swigging it all the time down to the store. I sees him. Mam she wouldn’t let him when she was alive. But there ain’t nobody to stop him now.”

“Nan! Nan!” came the shrill little voice from the fence. “Ain’t you *ever* a coming, Nan?”

“Yes, yes, right now, Patsy,” answered Nan.

“Never mind the tea, Davy dear. Put the kettle on, and we will have hot milk and water for supper. It’s better for little boys, anyhow. Mrs. Carter gives it to hers. Now, I am going for Patsy’s coach. He has been waiting for it all day, and I wouldn’t disappoint him for nuthing.” And Nan, whose tangle of red-brown curls seldom knew a comb, and whose pretty little face generally had a smudge on it, and whose soft gray eyes were prematurely wise and watchful and anxious, bundled herself into a ragged red shawl, and started out of the rickety cabin-door and down the weed-grown walk to the broken fence, where little lame Patsy was waiting patiently.

Patsy was just six, and had been Nan’s care for five years. His hard-working mother, unable to give her sickly babe the constant watchfulness it required, had taken the gray-eyed little girl from the county poorhouse,

where in default of an orphan asylum she had been kept since her own young mother, overtaken with sore need and sickness in a strange place, had crept into this shelter to die. "Anna Knowlton" was the name borne on the parish records by the little waif; but Nan's own baby lips, taught by some grim humorist among her pauper nurses, had changed it to "Nan Nobody."

Little Nan had come to the Farley cabin at seven years old, to earn her "board and keep" by rocking Patsy's cradle or watching him as he rolled over the floor or tumbled around the yard, while good Mrs. Farley toiled over the wash-tub, the ironing-table, the cooking-stove, finally sinking under her heavy burdens and lying down wearily to die.

She had been a true friend to our little Nan, had taken her to the good parish priest to be baptized and instructed, and had clothed and fed her, poorly, indeed, but as generously as she did her own. And when she died

a year ago, it was to Nan she whispered, with failing breath, "Take care of Patsy, Nan."

And her sobbing answer had been, "I will!"

Sturdily and faithfully had Nan kept her word. New clothes for Patsy were out of the question, but Dad's and Tim's and Dave's were cut and patched and shaped over, so that, although Patsy looked like a small scarecrow, he was always whole and warm. Nan's own curls might be a riotous tangle, but Patsy's golden ringlets were brushed carefully morning and night. School and church were not for Patsy, but all that Nan learned in her Sunday-school and instructions was hoarded carefully for Patsy's guidance and hope. And to-day Nan had a new delight for her little crippled charge.

"I am going, now, Patsy," she called cheerily, as she swung open the gate. "I won't be away ten minutes. And then, Patsy—then—then, oh, won't we go!"

"O Nan! hurry, hurry, hurry!" shrieked Patsy, in a rapture of expectation.

And Nan dashed off down the rocky hill and across the road to a square, comfortable-looking house, where for six weeks she had been doing odd chores for the busy mistress.

“Oh, if you please, ma’am, Mrs. Carter, I’ve—I’ve come for it!” said Nan, breathlessly, as she burst into the spotless kitchen.

“Come for it!” echoed the tall, hard-faced woman paring apples by the fire. “Bless me, child, stay where you are! Don’t track my scoured floor with those feet. You’ve come for *what?*”

“The coach, ma’am,” said Nan, excitedly—“the old baby-coach. Oh, please, ma’am, you haven’t forgotten! You promised I was to have it in pay for my work. I was here every evening for six weeks a helping to clean and scrub and scour, and everything. And you said I might have the coach.”

“You mean my baby-carriage! What in goodness’ name do you want with a baby-carriage, child? You had better let me give you some clothes; heaven knows you need

them badly. There's an old serge skirt of Nellie's up-stairs, a plaid waist and a jacket she has outgrown, that would make you quite respectable."

"Oh, no, ma'am—thank you, ma'am," said Nan, nervously. "I don't want nuthing like that, ma'am; leastways, I don't want to be respectable at all. I don't want nuthing but the coach. You see, it's this way, ma'am. Patsy is lame, and he hez got too big for me to kerry anywhere, and the wheelbarrow joggles his back and hurts him, and he's never been nowhere in all his life, except on the fence. And if you please, ma'am," Nan was twisting her little worn fingers piteously in her suspense, "I'd rather have the coach than anything in the whole wide world."

"Well, I don't know." Mrs. Carter was one of those good, close women, who haggle even over their "rags and bones." "That baby-carriage cost me ten dollars."

"Ten dollars!" faltered Nan, tremulously.

"I'm sure you can't think you've earned that," said the good housewife, sternly.

"Oh, no, ma'am," answered Nan. "I never could earn ten dollars, I know. But I thought you said, ma'am—" Nan choked up and quite broke down, in her disappointment. "And—and I told Patsy, and he hez been thinking of it all day, and he'll be that down-hearted if he don't get it, he'll cry all night."

"Then I suppose I must let you have it," said Mrs. Carter, who had only been haggling on general principles. "Though, really, if you take it, you ought to give me another month's help."

"Oh, I will, ma'am! I will, indeed!" answered Nan, eagerly. "I'll get up an hour earlier in the morning, and I'll come over and scour the milk pans and buckets every night. May I get the coach now, ma'am, please?"

"I suppose so," was the reluctant answer. "It's down in the shed, behind the wood-pile."

Nan waited for no further permission, but was off into the great back shed, where, white with dust, and hung with cobwebs, stood the old baby carriage, rusty, dingy and battered with a dozen years of use. But its proud possessor's eyes could not have flashed more delightedly if Cinderella's fairy coach had met their gaze. Eagerly she pushed it out of its hiding-place, and in another moment was hurrying breathlessly up the hill with her hard-won prize.

"She's coming, she's coming!" shrieked Patsy, excitedly. "Dave, Nan is coming with my coach. Help me down, help me down!"

"Here it is!" cried Nan, as, by some process known only to Dave and himself, Patsy managed to wriggle down from his perch on his helpless little legs. "Wait a bit till I brush off the dust and see how fine it is. Cushions, Patsy boy, and a top to keep off the sun, and a carpet for your feet, and everything. There, now, let us put you in."

And with a skilful lift Patsy was landed among the moth-eaten cushions. "Was there ever a finer fit? Why it's like it was made for you, Patsy boy."

"'Tain't Patsy's for good, for keeps," said Dave, as the small owner sat fairly speechless with delight, in his new equipage.

"Yes, it is!" said Nan, triumphantly. "It's Patsy's own, forever, forever. I earned it for him. I paid for it. I'm going to keep on paying for it, if it takes all winter. It's Patsy's own coach, and he can go wherever he wants. You stay and take care of the house, Davy, for it's Patsy's turn to go nutting now." And, giving a double hitch to her ragged shawl, Nan caught hold of the coach-handle, and with a shout of delight the cavalcade started down the hill. What a jaunt it was! What a wild, rapturous jaunt!

It would be hard to say which enjoyed it most: Nan, pushing and steadying the coach over rocks and ruts, her curls flying, her pale little face wearing an unusual glow;

or Patsy—Patsy who until to-day had never been out of sight of his cabin-door.

Dazed with delight at the painless motion, his poor little crippled body upborne for the first time by cushions and springs, the little fellow sat gazing around him with wide-open, staring eyes, while the fairy-coach rolled on, far from the bare, rocky hillside, the broken fence, the smoky cabin, up to strange, beautiful heights, where the cliffs rose draped in vines and mosses, the woods stretched in radiant vistas of scarlet and gold, and the little streamlet—forced to turn the wheels of great factories in the valley—leaped foaming and sparkling in glad freedom down the hills.

It was October, breezy, bracing October, and, though the air was golden with sunshine, it had a snap and sparkle that told Jack Frost was not far away. The harvests had been gathered, the cider presses were busy with the late apples, the nuts were rattling merrily down from the wind-tossed

boughs, and the bushy-tailed little squirrels were trying to get ahead of the boys in gathering their Christmas stores. The nutting parties were scouring the hills, beating the big walnuts and chestnuts, and Patsy fairly trembled with excitement at all these novel sights and sounds.

“Hallo! Who comes here?” shouted Rush Williams, who, having filled his bag and pockets, was ready for a lark of another kind.

Rush was the bully of the little factory town, an idle good-for-nothing, who delighted in tormenting and terrifying all boys under his own hulking size and weight.

“Look here, boys!” he cried, as Nan and her vehicle came in sight. “Here’s a swell turnout. How’s this for style? Where did you get your coach, Hippitty-hop?” continued the young ruffian, stopping Patsy’s progress with a rough hand.

“None of your business,” tartly answered Nan, resenting the nickname of her nursling.

“It’s Patsy’s coach. I bought it for him. Get out of the way and let me go on.”

“Not much! We’re holding this road—ain’t we, boys? You can’t come none of your games on us, Nan Nobody. She bought the carriage, she says, boys. That’s a good one; bought it for Hippitty-hop to take the air.”

“She did, she did,” wailed Patsy. “It’s my own carriage. Let me go, Rush Williams; let me go.”

“Pay toll, then,” was the answer. “Folks that ride in their own carriages must pay toll. Five cents, or out you go on the roadside, Hippitty, for we want this ’ere coach to load up with nuts.”

“Let him alone,” said Nan, in a low voice, though her eyes began to flash dangerously. “You mean coward, to try and frighten a little fellow like this. Don’t mind him, Patsy boy, he won’t touch you.”

“Oh, I won’t, eh?” answered Rush, making a feint towards Patsy.

“Nan! Nan! O Nan!” shrieked the child.

“Touch him, if you dare, Rush Williams!”  
And with blazing eyes Nan sprang like a young tigress in front of Patsy. “Just touch him, if *you dare!*”

## CHAPTER II.

### A RIDE AND ITS ENDING.

“STAND back, stand back!” “I’ll bet on Nan!” “Don’t take a dare, Rush!” “You can’t fight a girl!” rose the contradicting shouts on every side.

“Oh, can’t I, though?” said Rush, his heavy brows blackening into an ugly frown; “I don’t let boy or girl bully me. I can pitch Nan Nobody and her lame kid over the rocks, quick as wink.”

“Eh, God bless me! what’s all this?” said a tall, pleasant-faced gentleman, who had approached the group unobserved.

“Father Tom, Father Tom,” piped Patsy, tremulously stretching out his arms, “the boys are going to take my coach. They’re going to pitch me over the rocks.”

“Oh, they are,” said Father Tom, folding

his arms and surveying the would-be bandits.

“Well, you can count me in the game, my lads. Come on and try ‘pitching’ Patsy.”

There was a chorus of forced laughter. Father Tom had been the athlete of his class at college, and had lost neither skill nor muscle. Only the week before a foul-mouthed young ruffian, singing mocking songs under the church windows, had been punished with a scientific vigor that had impressed the youth of the town forcibly.

“For shame,” continued Father Tom, his twinkling eyes growing stern as he gazed on the abashed group before him. “Great, hulking fellows like you, frightening cripples and girls! Do you call yourselves boys, or brutes? Why, a respectable dog is a gentleman beside you. He obeys the God-given instinct to protect the weak. Go on your way, my child,” he continued to Nan. “It was only a joke with the boys, I hope. Surely there is not a lad before me mean and cowardly enough to hurt a little cripple. How are the walnuts

this year?" And Father Tom, having delivered his sermon, changed his tone cheerily, while he walked on with the boys to prevent any more mischief. "If you have more than you want, I'll take them at market price. So drop all you can spare at the rectory kitchen. Some of you can make your tickets for the big football game at St. Cyr next week. I tell you, it will be well worth seeing. I used to be half-back on the St. Cyr team a dozen years ago myself, and I mean to be there next week to wave my old colors." And thus Father Tom made his way back to town, surrounded by the crowd he had so soundly rated a moment ago, chatting as blithely and comfortably as if nothing at all unpleasant had happened.

Meanwhile Nan had pushed on up the hill, not stopping to draw breath until her tormentors were out of sight, and she was far up on the breezy heights, in a little bypath that wound deep into the autumn woods.

Then she paused, and, throned in state,

Patsy sat among his coach-cushions, while Nan gathered the nuts that lay thick among the fallen leaves, plucked the last grapes from the gnarled vine twisting among the trees, and shook down the persimmons, wrinkled and sweetened by the first touch of the frost.

"Gee, it's nice up here," said Patsy, with a long-drawn breath of delight. "Red and yellow trees, and nuts and grapes, and—everything. I wisht we didn't have to go back. I wisht we could stay here always, don't you, Nan?"

"I'll bring you again, whenever you want to come," said Nan. "That's the good part of having a coach. You can go wherever you please."

"I know," said Patsy. "It's almost as good as having legs. I wonder why God didn't make my legs right, Nan," he added, reflectively.

"I don't know," answered Nan, feeling Patsy had struck upon a point of theology that was too much for her. "Sister Sera-

phine said God always gives us what is best for us, so maybe legs wouldn't be good for you, Patsy. You might run off somewhere, fishing or swimming, and get drowned."

"No, I wouldn't," said Patsy, his pale little face flushing, excitedly. "I wouldn't never do nothing like that, Nan. I'd run errands for you, and chop wood, and draw water. I'd never sass back, like Dave does sometimes. I'd be good to you, Nan, because you're so good to me. Nobody is good to me like you, Nan. You make me clothes, and tell me stories, and buy me a fine coach like this. You ain't ever a going away from me, Nan, are you?" And the pale little face puckered up with sudden anxiety.

"Never," answered Nan, heartily. "What put such a funny thing in your head?"

"I heard Milly talking, last night, when you was over helping Mrs. Carter. She was telling Dad I was too big for nussing now, and you weren't no kin and it was time fur you to go away."

"Milly said that!" gasped Nan, breathlessly. "What else, Patsy?"

"She thought I was asleep, but I heard her," continued Patsy, nodding sagely. "She said she wasn't a going to work at the factory all day long to keep strange gals doing nothing at home. And Dad said you was getting bossy, and a hiding money from him when he wanted his beer. And Tim—"

"What did Tim say?" panted poor Nan, feeling as if her little world were shaking beneath her feet.

"Something bad," answered Patsy, opening his blue eyes in solemn horror. "Something very bad, Nan. Must I tell you?"

"Yes, yes; tell me, Patsy, quick."

"Tim said you were all that kept us from going to the devil," replied Patsy, in a low voice. "Tim is an awful bad boy, isn't he, Nan? Oh, don't go away from me, Nan. Milly would be cross and shake my bad shoulder. Don't ever go away from me, Nan."

"I won't," said Nan, her eyes flashing. "I guess I know better than to let Milly Farley lay her hands on you. A nice house it would be if it was left to her. Don't you worry, Patsy. I ain't ever a going to leave. I'll stay by you forever and forever. And we'll go riding and nutting and coasting till you get to be a man, Patsy, a big, strong man—like—like—" Nan cast about her for an ideal type of manhood.

"Like Father Tom?" interrupted Patsy, eagerly. "O Nan! will I ever be big and straight and strong like Father Tom?"

"Why not?" asked Nan, evasively. "And then—then you'll make lots of money, Patsy—big men always do; and you'll take care of *me*, Patsy."

"Yes, yes, tell me about it, Nan," said the little fellow, his puny face all aglow with interest.

Nan seated herself on a mossy rock beside her, her thin hands clasped around her knees.

“We’ll have a house, big as Mrs. Carter’s; and a nice, clean kitchen, and I’ll scour it every day. And we will have nice, hot soup, with a fresh bone in it for dinner; and plenty of sugar in our tea, and maybe butter for supper, Patsy, nice yellow butter.”

“And oranges. Couldn’t we have oranges sometimes, Nan? Oh, I love oranges.”

“You might have an orange every Sunday, Patsy. I wouldn’t want no such extravagance; apples would do me. I’d have an apple-tree at the door, and I’d make apple dumplings. And we’d have a parlor, with ruffled curtains to the windows; and a clock and two china dogs on the mantel.”

“O Nan!” Patsy’s tone was one of blissful perturbation, “we couldn’t have all that.”

“Yes, we could,” asserted Nan, stoutly. “And I’ll cook and wash and iron, and dry apples; and we will go to church on Sunday, in good clothes—”

“And shoes—nice, shiny shoes, Nan, with

no holes in them," interposed Patsy, breathlessly. "O Nan! it would be just as good as heaven, wouldn't it?"

"No," said Nan, shaking her head. "It may sound that way, but it wouldn't. Sister Seraphine said nothing could be as good as heaven. If you was to think all day, and all night, too, you couldn't come near thinking how good it is. Not if you was to have oranges and apples and bananas every day, Patsy, it wouldn't be anywhere near it. Heaven is better than all the good things in the world; and Sister Seraphine said, once you got there, nobody could take you away or put you out of it. But here we are a fooling, Patsy, and that bag of nuts we promised Davy ain't filled yet." And Nan started up from her rock, and began to push in through the golden woods in search of richer harvest.

All the bright afternoon they lingered on the sun-kissed heights, and, when at last the little wanderers turned homeward through the lengthening shadows, Patsy's coach was

heavy with childhood's treasure trove—nuts and grapes and persimmons, boughs of gorgeous-hued leaves, old birds' nests, queer bits of lichened wood, and shining pebbles, smoothed by the dancing stream.

Slowly and cautiously steering her carriage down the hill, Nan was startled by the sight of a familiar little figure dashing madly up the road to meet her.

"Davy!" she cried, with a presentiment of evil. "O Davy, what is it?"

"Run!" panted Davy, whose sandy hair was nearly standing on end, and whose blue eyes were popping with excitement. "Gimme the coach, and you cut and run, Nan. Dad's sold ye!"

"Sold me!" echoed Nan, clutching the coach-handle, with a feeling that the earth was shaking beneath her feet. "Sold me! He couldn't—he dassent, Davy."

"He has," repeated Davy, breathlessly. "Oh, 'deed he has, Nan. I heerd him. He got three hundred dollars for ye."

"Three hundred dollars!" said Nan. "Who'd give three hundred dollars for me? Three hundred dollars! You've got things wrong, Dave. He was selling the house, I guess, or the cow—not *me*."

"No; it was you—you," persisted Dave, desperately. "I heerd him and the man talking. And you was to be took away, and we was never to see or hear of you no more. The man said that, too. And he was going to give Dad three hundred dollars. I was hiding in the cupboard, and heerd it all."

"O Nan! my Nan, my Nan," wailed Patsy. "Dad shan't sell my Nan."

"Don't cry, Patsy dear, don't cry," faltered poor Nan, all the vague fears that had dimly floated through her mind taking shape at this dire news. "Don't you skeer. Nobody can't sell me. Did—did the man come from the poorhouse, Dave?"

"No," answered Dave; "he come in the keers. And he had a watch, for I seen him look at it. And he said he was going right

back, far away somewhere, and take you 'long. And we all wasn't never to ask to see you no more, fur that was the bargain. An' he paid Dad three hundred dollars. I seen him. Dad was bound to sell something. I heerd him say so yesterday," explained Dave. "I guess he thought he'd better let you go than the cow. And three hundred dollars is a lot of money, Nan."

"Oh, oh, oh!" wailed poor little Patsy, as the three children paused in the fading sunlight, while the shadows gathering in the valley below seemed waiting to engulf them in new and terrible gloom.

"Run, Nan, run, run!" cried the two little ones, desperately.

Nan hesitated. She could remember old black Chloe, who had worked in the poor-house, and the stories the old woman had told of slave days, when she had been bought and sold. Standing there in the gathering twilight, the whole dreadful situation seemed to flash upon our poor little heroine:

No tea, no sugar, Finnegan's bill, drunken Dad, heartless Milly—ah! Nan thought she saw it all. She was to be the victim sacrificed for the dire family need. She was to be sold instead of the cow, that they might live and eat.

Poor, little, ignorant Nan! In the wild surge of helpless terror that swept over her, one figure alone rose strong, calm, and upright, to protect, to defend.

“Father Tom!” she panted, with a hard dry sob. “Oh, he will take keer of me. Here, ketch on to Patsy's coach, Dave, and don't upset him. I'm going—I'm going straight to Father Tom.”

## CHAPTER III.

### UNCLE JACK.

FATHER TOM had company, this evening. A wood-fire blazed cheerfully in the little rectory study, there were cigars upon the table, and Father Tom, seated in his big arm-chair, was doing his best to entertain his guest, a sturdy, middle-aged gentleman, evidently of choleric temper, who, regardless of the good priest's soothing words, was striding up and down the room in great excitement.

"The drunken boor! I don't know how I kept my hands off him. To think of Amy's child—my sister's child—drudging in a hovel like that! Good heaven, sir! It's maddening—simply maddening!"

"But, my dear friend, you can make it all right now."

“I can’t, sir; I can’t,” answered the other, mopping his flushed brow. “I can’t undo the past. I can’t take my dead sister out of her pauper’s grave. I can’t strike out the years of misery and poverty that have made her poor child—I dare not think what. That clodhopper told me she had cost him at least six dollars for shoes—six dollars in as many years, and he was trying to drive a bargain at that—and he calculated her food at less than it costs me to feed a dog. Amy’s child! And she has been drudge and scullion in that hovel since she could stand alone; while I—”

“My dear Captain Leighton, don’t reproach yourself,” said Father Tom, gently. “Remember, you have been absent for years, and it was impossible for you to know all this. It was through no fault of yours—”

“Aye, sir, it was—it was,” interrupted the Captain, almost fiercely. “Wasn’t I a hot-headed idiot to poor Amy? Didn’t I tell her that if she married that young fool, Knowlton, I would never speak to her again?

Didn't I start off the day of her wedding without a good wish or a good-by to the poor little girl? Didn't I stay at the ends of the earth, a heartless, soulless money-grubber, while she suffered and starved and died? And now I come home—home—with a round million—home, thinking and planning how I can bless and brighten her life. I find that Amy has lain for ten years in a poorhouse grave. And her child!—God forgive me, for I can never forgive myself—her child is a drudge in the beggar's hovel I have just left—a hovel where I wouldn't stable my horse. But I'll make it up to her," said the Captain, clearing his voice. "With God's help, I'll make it up to her. She shall never know another pain or want or care. I will make her forget all that is past."

"Forget!" repeated Father Tom, thinking of the little wild-eyed figure standing on defense of Patsy that very afternoon, "I fear it will be hard for Nan to forget. Old ties are hard to break."

“Old ties!” said the Captain, flushing excitedly. “Great heaven, sir, what ties can Amy’s child have to the life she has known? To that beggar’s hovel! that beggar’s brood! She shall never see—never hear of them again. I will take care of that. I’ve bought that boor Farley off on his own terms. Three hundred dollars, he asked; three hundred dollars would square him up, he said, and he would agree never to trouble me again. And he had better not,” added the Captain, fiercely. “I paid him his price, and told him we were done with him and his forever. If he ever made any claim upon my niece, I’d—I’d break his neck!” And the Captain strode across the study-floor, blowing off his wrath as a big boat blows off steam, and, as Father Tom well knew, meaning no harm to anybody.

For the blue eyes, shaded by the Captain’s shaggy, iron-gray brows, were soft and tender as a woman’s, and the strong mouth, hidden by the bushy iron-gray beard was quivering

now with grief and pain. That Father Tom understood, as big men understand each other, and the Captain might have blurted out almost anything without shocking the good priest in the least.

“It seems to me, you were unnecessarily generous,” said Father Tom. “Farley has no claim upon the child at all. His wife, who was a very worthy woman, took her to assist in the care of a little cripple.”

“Aye; so they told me, at—at the poor-house,” answered the Captain, his voice growing husky again. “I’ve heard the story, sir—the whole wretched story, when they gave me the little box of papers that poor Amy left in case any one ever asked for her. And I gave the superintendent my opinion pretty frankly. Talk about child slavery! Sending a mite of seven out to nurse a crippled beggar! By George, sir, if I think this matter over I’ll go off into an apoplexy. My head has been in a fume all day. Eh, God bless me! what’s that?”

“That” was a shriek and scuffle in the hall without, that made both gentlemen start forward in alarm.

“Stop, ye rascalion, stop! Don’t I tell ye his riverence has company widin? Murther, murther, was there iver the likes of her?” came the tones of Biddy Flynn, Father Tom’s housekeeper.

“I will go in! I will, I will!” cried a fresh, clear, young voice. “Father Tom, Father Tom!” And the study-door was burst open desperately, and there, struggling in Biddy’s grasp, upon the threshold, was a little, wild-eyed, tangle-haired, smutty-faced creature, a ragged red shawl trailing from her shoulders, and her form trembling piteously as a hunted hare’s.

“I—I couldn’t kape her out, yer riverence,” panted the housekeeper. “She’s been fighting me like a wildcat to get in here to ye.”

“Father Tom, Father Tom, oh, help me, save me, take care of me! Please, Father

Tom, send me to Sister Seraphine. Oh, I'll work, I'll scrub, I'll wash, I'll milk, I'll do anything; but, oh, don't let Dad Farley sell me, please, please, Father Tom!"

"Nan, Nan, my poor child, be quiet," said Father Tom, soothingly, for Nan had flung herself on her knees, with her face buried in her hands, and was shaking from head to foot. "You don't understand, Nan."

"Oh, I do, I do," sobbed Nan. "Finnegan wants his money, and there ain't any sugar or tea in the house, and they don't want to sell the cow, and they are going to sell *me* for three—three—three hundred—dollars," wailed Nan, with a fresh outburst.

"Sell you," laughed Father Tom, "you poor little goose! Sell you, Nan!"

"Oh, yes, yes; and I'll never see Patsy or nobody again, never—never—n-e-v-e-r!"

"Nan, my dear little child, listen. Stop crying, and listen to me, Nan. Such a blessing has come to you, my child! Look up, Nan, look at this good gentleman beside me.

He is your uncle—your dear mother's brother. It was he who just now generously paid three hundred dollars to those who had given you poor shelter and care all these years. It is he who has come to claim you for his own little girl, to take you to a happy, comfortable home, to love and care for you, Nan."

"Aye, aye, my little girl—my poor little girl," murmured Captain Leighton, huskily, for he had nearly lost breath as well as speech at Nan's appearance. "My lost Amy's little girl! Look up at your Uncle Jack."

And then Nan lifted her head, and looked into the kind blue eyes that were swimming with tears beneath their shaggy brows; for in the little smut-stained face, the big gray eyes, the tangled curls, the quivering lips, Uncle Jack saw again the eyes and hair and face and lips of the dear little sister who had been his pet, his care, his plaything, in the long ago.

And before Nan could quite understand it all, she was clasped in strong arms, and held close to the loving heart that was to be henceforth her shelter against all sorrow and toil and trouble—her home and queendom forever.

The rest of that evening was like a dream to Nan. Such a sun of love and care and tenderness had risen upon her young life, that the strange new light dazzled and bewildered her. For, with his strong, kind arm around her trembling little form, Uncle Jack told her how he had been looking for her more than a year; how glad and thankful he was to have found his dear sister's little girl at last; how he was going to take her away with him, and give her pretty dresses and boots and bonnets, and birds and kittens and ponies. There was no end to the things Uncle Jack promised, in his pity for that pale, tearful, half-starved little face that looked into his own.

And then good Mrs. Flynn, at Father

Tom's suggestion, bore Nan off to supper, and she had tea and buttered cakes and baked apples with cream, while the worthy house-keeper kept up a fire of wondering questions and ejaculations at the events of the evening.

"Holy Mother, I niver heard the likes. Your own born uncle, ye say, and as illegant a gentleman as I iver seen. It's down on yer knees ye ought to be this minnit, Nan, thanking God for His mercies to ye. And a carriage and pair waiting at the door for him, and not a dacint rag to yer back, and yer nose blacked like a chimney-sweep. Shure the luck has changed for ye this day, ye poor innocent, it has indade. Have another sup of the tay, child? Ye luk as if the breath was sthruck out of ye, and no wonder. And where is he going to take yez from this?"

"Oh, I don't know—I don't know," answered Nan, tremulously. "He says he is going to get me everything, Mrs. Flynn—boots and dresses and bonnets, a kitten and a pony. Oh, it's so nice to have an uncle—

a real uncle. O Mrs. Flynn! hasn't he got a fine coat, and a gold watch, and everything clean and shining? And he kissed me. Nobody ever kissed me before, but Patsy. O Patsy! poor, poor little Patsy. O Mrs. Flynn! if my uncle would only take Patsy, too!"

"Whisht, now, whisht," said the good woman, anxiously. "Don't ye go blathering like a little fool about Patsy! Do ye think it's a whole orphan asylum your uncle is afther? Patsy, indade! What would a fine illigant gentleman like that be doing wid beggars loike the Farleys?"

"Oh, I can't give up Patsy," said Nan, choking up. "I don't know what he will do without me."

"Come, Nan, the carriage is waiting. Your uncle wants to catch the next train," called Father Tom, cheerily, from the hall. And before poor, little, dazed Nan could quite realize the situation, Mrs. Flynn had whisked her off to her own room, bathed her

face, brushed her hair, pinned her red shawl neatly about her neck, tied a comfortable gray knit hood of her own over Nan's curls, and hurried the bewildered girl to the door, where Uncle Jack, muffled in a big ulster, was waiting impatiently.

“Come, my little girl, come! Only ten minutes! Good-by, Father, and thank you for your kindness. You will hear from me again.”

“Good-by, good-by, and God bless you, my little Nan!” And the priestly hand was placed for a moment in blessing on the gray hood, and, sobbing, she scarcely knew why, Nan found herself lifted into a soft-cushioned carriage, and whirled off through the starlit night, far from the little cabin on the hillside, from the old ties, the old love, the old want and work and woes, forever.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A NEW HOME.

AND still feeling as if she were in a dream, Nan found herself at the station, amid flashing lights and shouting porters and clanging bells and shrieking whistles, and listened, dazed and breathless, while Uncle Jack stormed because the train was late, he couldn't get a sleeper, and swore that he would rather travel in Madagascar than in such a benighted land as this; for the sight of his dead sister's neglected Nan had so torn Uncle Jack's heart with remorse and tenderness, that he was obliged to thunder off the pain at somebody or something.

And then Nan, who had never been in the cars in her poor little life, was lifted into a beautiful Pullman parlor car that seemed all gold and mirrors and cushions, and was

whirled away through the dim starlight. It was as if she had been caught up into another world, everything was so strange and beautiful and new. Nan really couldn't find words to speak. She could only stare with wide-open eyes at everything—the lights, the gilding, the silken draperies; at Uncle Jack, so big and handsome in his great ulster; at the brass-buttoned porter, who brought her fruit and pretty little cakes and wonderful sugar plums that seemed far too good to eat. She could not realize that henceforth nothing would be too good for Uncle Jack's little girl.

And as the train swept on, whirling through the forests and valleys, thundering through the mountain gorges, leaping the mountain streams, Uncle Jack told her stories—stories that to poor little Nan's unaccustomed ear seemed as wild and unreal as any “Arabian Night's” dream—about the big house he had bought in the country, and the horses, the dogs, the swans, the peacocks,

the greenhouses where flowers bloomed all the year round, the river where she could sail and swim and row.

“For we can’t think of school just yet,” said Uncle Jack, positively. “You must get strong and well, and rosy and fat, and learn to forget—forget all that is past. That is all Uncle Jack will ask of you, my little girl, never to speak, never to think of the life you leave behind you to-night. It is gone, gone forever; and you are to be gay and glad and rosy and happy, and never have a care or trouble again.”

“And won’t—won’t I ever see Patsy no more?” faltered Nan, in a low voice.

“Never!” thundered Uncle Jack, quite unconscious of the blow that he was administering; for to him Nan’s past seemed a record of want and woe that had not a brightening gleam. “Never! If I catch any of that Farley crew near you,” and here I am afraid Uncle Jack forgot himself and swore a big round sailor oath, “I’ll break their heads!

You are my little girl now, and you must forget everything else.”

Forget—forget! Ah, sturdy Uncle Jack had learned many things in his fifty years of busy life—secrets of the earth, of the sea, of the stars, of the heart of man, and the heart of woman—but he had yet to learn the depths of love and faith and tenderness that can dwell in the heart of a little girl—when he told Nan to “forget.”

All night long the train thundered on, while Nan, whose wide-open eyes had closed at last, lay snuggled up under Uncle Jack’s traveling-rug, dreaming of the old cabin on the hillside, Patsy’s shrill call from the fence, the coach-ride up the mountain, the terrified flight to Father Tom.

“Patsy, Patsy!” was the cry upon her lips, as she started up to find the sunlight streaming in her window, and Uncle Jack calling:

“Come, my little girl, come! We are almost home.”

And still half-awake, she was hurried from the cars into a carriage, and whirled away over smooth country roads, to a big, beautiful house—a house with great pillared porticos, and shading oaks, and wide lawns stretching to a blue river, flashing and gleaming below—a house that, to Nan's bewildered eyes, seemed a fairy-palace rising out of the rosy glory of the morn.

As the carriage swept up to the door, Uncle Jack's dogs came leaping and barking to meet him, men servants and maid servants appeared from stable and garden and kitchen, and quite a stately old personage in black silk gown and marvelous cap stood curtsying in the open hall, as Uncle Jack led ragged little Nan, in her red shawl and gray hood, across his threshold.

“Here she is, Mrs. Bunch! I have found my sister's little girl at last, and brought her home to you. Good people all, here's a little mistress for you—my niece, Miss Nanny Knowlton, the lady of Oakhurst Hall.”

“It’s glad and happy I am to see her,” said Mrs. Bunch, sweeping another curtsy that made her silken skirts rustle prodigiously, while poor little Nan stood quite awe-struck at her grandeur. “Your telegram came last night, and the rooms are ready, and with your leave, sir, I’ll take my little lady up, for she must be tired after her long night ride.”

And then Nan, who had never had even a pillow to call her own, was led through the broad hall, with its great deer antlers and bearskin rugs, and idols and images, and shields, and ivory tusks, and all sorts of queer things Uncle Jack had gathered from afar, and up the wide polished stairs, lighted by a beautiful painted window, into a room, which, Mrs. Bunch said, with another awful curtsy, had been warming and airing by the master’s orders all night.

Such a rosy, cozy, beautiful room, with its pretty chintz draperies and soft-cushioned chairs. Such a snow-drift of a bed, piled

with dainty ruffled pillows! Such a log fire, cracking and blazing on big brass andirons that winked back its glow! Such a warm, sweet, sheltered nest for a poor little wind-tossed bird!

“You’ll find the bath in here, Miss,” said Mrs. Bunch, opening a door and showing a shimmer of white tiles and silver beyond, “and I’ll have your trunk sent up in a moment; and if you would like me to do your hair, or anything of that sort, Miss—I was head nurse at Lady Lowbray’s in my own country, Miss, and had a clever hand with little misses like yourself—”

“Oh, oh, oh!”—Mrs. Bunch stopped abruptly, for Nan had dropped into a chair before the fire, and buried her head in her hands—“I want to go home, I want to go home!”

“Dearie, dear!” gasped Mrs. Bunch, who, being a recent importation, found it somewhat difficult to retain proper English decorum in face of American oddities.

“I ain’t no little lady,” blurted forth Nan, sobbing. Somehow Mrs. Bunch, with her cap and gown and curtsy, was the last straw that broke the long strain upon overwrought heart and brain and nerves. “And I ain’t got no trunk nor no clothes, nor nothing. Oh, I ain’t fit for a room like this. I want to go back to Patsy, my own, poor little Patsy. There’s nobody to cook or wash or sew for him, or to take him out riding. Oh, I want to go home, I want to go home!”

“My dear, my dear, this won’t do, this won’t do at all!” And Mrs. Bunch, who had a good, motherly old heart beneath her imported “manners,” spoke in a new tone of soothing kindness. “You couldn’t find a better home than this if you searched the whole world for it, nor a finer, nobler gentleman than its master, your kind, good uncle. You’re tired and nervous now, my dear, that’s all, and worried and worn out; and I’ll bring you up some nice tea and toast, and then you must let old Mother Bunch—that is what my

little ladies called me in the old country—you must let old Mother Bunch undress you and put you to bed, to rest until luncheon.”

And when Mother Bunch dropped her English style and simper and curtsy, she was such a good, strong, kind, warm-hearted, sensible old woman, that nervous, tired little Nan yielded almost unconsciously to her will, and she was soon snuggled up among soft blankets and ruffled pillows and downy counterpanes, sleeping as became the little mistress of Oakhurst Hall.

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“Well, and how is my little girl now, Mrs. Bunch?” asked Uncle Jack, who was pacing the quarter-deck,—as he called the big hall—when his housekeeper came down the stairs.

“Sleeping nicely, sir,” was the answer. “I gave her a little drop of something quieting with her tea, for her nerves were all unstrung. A pretty little creature she is, sir, but, if I may make bold to say so, sore in need of kindness and care.”

“Aye, she is, she is!” answered Uncle Jack, his voice growing husky. “And I will make it worth your while to give it to her, Mrs. Bunch. Consider your wages raised ten dollars from this morning, madam, for any extra trouble you may have with my niece.”

“Thank you, sir, thank you,” said the good woman, curtsying. “Though I’m sure its not of extra trouble or extra money I was thinking when I spoke; but it went to my heart, it did, indeed, sir, to see the way that poor little creature must have been neglected. Not a whole bit of clothes, nor an ounce of flesh upon her poor little body—she is nothing but rags and bones.”

Uncle Jack began to pace his quarter-deck restlessly.

“She is ill, you think? Wants a doctor? I’ll send Denison right up.”

“O dear, no, sir; it’s not doctoring she wants; it’s feeding, sir.”

“Feed her, then, madam! God bless me,

feed her! Get her wine, broth, cream, anything she can eat. Tempt her with everything children like—apples, grapes, puddings, oranges. I'll buy that Alderney that Lambert has for sale this very day, so she can have the best of milk. Feed her, madam! Make my little Nan fat and rosy and strong, and you shall have the finest gold watch in town for a Christmas gift. As for clothes—here, madam.” Uncle Jack went down into his pocket and brought out a roll of bills.

“Take the carriage, and go to town and buy them for her—plenty of them—don't stint. If that isn't money enough, call for more. I want her to have everything—boots and bonnets and frocks; nice, soft, warm, fluffy things, like the little Lamberts wear—plenty of frills and ribbons and gimcracks. Don't mind the money, Mrs. Bunch. When I think of the way that poor little girl has been half-starved and half-frozen, I feel ”—Uncle Jack choked up for a minute before he could go

on—"I feel as if I would like to spend my whole million on her right now."

In the warmth of such tenderness as this, it was no wonder that our little Nan soon began to blossom and brighten like a flower in the springtime sun. Mother Bunch was not a bad guide in the paths of gentility, and Nan was quick to learn, for she was a lady born. In less than two weeks from her arrival at Oakhurst, the red-brown curls were caught back in pretty ripples from an arch, winsome little face, that already had the faint flush of an apple-blossom, and Nan, in her dark-blue sailor suit, was skipping down the broad stairs, pacing the "quarter-deck," at Uncle Jack's side, making cakes and puddings and jellies with Mrs. Bunch in the housekeeper's pantry, feeding the dogs, riding the horses, sailing the boat—in short, had fitted into the situation as only a clever little girl creature can; for a girl will know six different ways of fixing her hair while her big brother is learning to brush his shoes.

And if Nan had been a boy—well, Uncle Jack would have found things vastly more uncomfortable. As it was, though Nan sometimes mixed the uses of knife and fork, and her moods and tenses were not all they should be, she caught up things with astonishing rapidity, and before the last leaves had drifted down from the sheltering trees the little mistress of Oakhurst Hall was quite “at home.”

“She is learning to forget,” thought Uncle Jack, as he saw the rose deepening in her cheek, and the light growing in her eye, and the merry smile dimpling her rounding face. “My little girl is learning—to forget.”

Ah, Uncle Jack little guessed the dreams that came nightly to Nan’s pillow, or the confidences poured into good Mother Bunch’s ears in the privacy of the housekeeper’s pantry.

“O Mother Bunch! do you think I will ever see my poor little Patsy again?” Nan would ask, after she had told all the toils

and trials and troubles of the little hillside cabin. "Will Uncle Jack ever let me see him again?"

And Mother Bunch, who was a wise old woman and had been taught in her own country to keep the closet doors shut tight on family skeletons, would answer evasively: "Oh, yes, my dear, sometime, no doubt. But your uncle has paid these people well, you say, and—and—well, I wouldn't trouble him about them just now. Not—just—now."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE LITTLE LADY OF OAKHURST.

IT was no wonder that Uncle Jack felt sore about his little girl's past, for the Leightons had been a proud old family for generations; but sad changes had come to them in Uncle Jack's youth; the Civil War had swept away fortune, friends, and home, and for years the young sailor was the sole guardian and support of the little sister Amy, who was nearly twenty years his junior.

But the Leightons were a self-willed race, and when pretty Amy persisted in marrying one whom Uncle Jack savagely termed a worthless fool, hot and bitter things were said on both sides, and, in the fierce wrath of one whose tenderest heart chords were torn, Uncle Jack had sailed away, as he believed, never to return.

For years he had wandered in far-off countries—Africa, Australia, the East Indies—until, with wealth beyond his wishes, a heart-sick longing came over him for home. Time had softened his bitterness. He would go home to Amy—he would bless and brighten her life with his hard-earned gold.

And he had returned to find only the poor-house grave, and little half-starved beggar Nan—Nan, who with her mother's hair, her mother's eyes, her mother's lips, stirred his big heart into pity, remorse and tenderness.

This new Amy must have all—all that her mother had lost, all that his wealth could buy, all that the world could give.

And from the rosy day-dawn, when Nan crossed his threshold, Uncle Jack began to dream and plan as in his busy life he had never dreamed and planned before. A jealous pride for his little girl woke in his heart. He winced at the thought of the boorish Farley, and the cabin on the hillside, and all poor Nan's vulgar, wretched past.

“But she will forget it all—I will make her forget it,” said Uncle Jack to himself, as he paced his “quarter-deck.” “I will give her a year to grow rosy and strong and happy, and then the best schools, the best teachers, the best masters. And she will learn—by George, my little Nan has the head to learn everything. She shall be the star and queen of the whole Leighton line.”

Meanwhile, quite unconscious of all these brilliant plans for her future, Nan was making acquaintances for herself in the friendly old fashion of the little cabin on the hill.

She soon knew all the horses and dogs by name. The great St. Bernard, Lear, always stalked out of his palatial kennel at Nan’s voice. Job, Uncle Jack’s old gray monkey, awoke from his doze in the big palm when she entered the greenhouse, and turned a rheumatic somersault—to shake hands. The parrot fairly raised the house with his new shriek of “Nan, Nan, Polly wants Nan!”

Then there was Con, the stable boy, whose

blue eyes had a look that recalled Patsy's; and Wertha, the Norwegian dairymaid, with her long, fair plaits and her queer, broken English; and Mat, the old one-legged shipmate of Captain Jack, who jobbed around house and garden and stable, doing anything or nothing, as he pleased. Nan was friends with them all.

With Mat, Nan had an especial bond of interest, since Uncle Jack's first introduction had been:

"Shipmate, here's a little craft that flies your Pope's colors."

"God be praised for that, sir," Mat had answered, heartily, "an' I'm sure you're not one of the pirates to make her ever pull thim down."

"No," said Uncle Jack, carelessly; "they are good enough colors in their way, and I have promised they shall stick to the mast. So, as she is in strange waters here, you must pilot her around. You can have the light carriage on Sunday morning. I believe there

is a Catholic church at Denley, and I can trust you to look out for her, I know."

"You can, sir," said Mat. And from that moment Mat kept his eye on the little lady, who was indeed in strange waters, as he knew. Every Sunday morning, rain or shine, the light carriage was at the door, with old Mat, "scrubbed and pipe-clayed," as he expressed it, on the driver's seat. The little Chapel of St. Agnes was five miles from Oakhurst, but if it had been fifteen Nan would have gone all the same; for old Mat was not the pilot to stop for wind or tide.

"The Captain is the finest man that ever walked a deck," explained Mat to Father Paul; "but he is the black heretic for all that, an' I mane to kape the little misthress in the straight way to hiven, since he gave me lave. We will be here next Sunday, Father, and ye can do the rest."

And every Sunday the congregation of St. Agnes saw the curiously mated pair in the first pew, duly rented by Uncle Jack: the

rugged-faced old sailor, who stumped on his one leg up the aisle, and the pretty little girl, whose red-brown hair was surmounted by a plumed hat of the latest Paris fashion, who was wrapped in "soft, fluffy things" to her pink-tipped ears, who always dropped a dollar in the poor-box as she passed.

"It's a dale, Miss," Nan's "pilot" said doubtfully. "Ye can do as ye plase with what the Captain gives ye av coorse, but a dollar isn't looked fur ivery week, let me tell ye."

"Oh, but it goes to people that have no tea or milk or sugar, Mat, and maybe bills at the corner grocery they can't pay, and little children without shoes. Oh, you don't know what it is to be like that. I do, Mat, I do."

"Whisht now, Miss, whisht," Mat, who knew all, would answer in a stage whisper. "Shure that's all past and gone, and it's only breaking your heart and the Captain's to be talking about it. It's fine winds and fine

weather for ye now, Miss, and don't be thinkin' of the black clouds that is past."

So the bright fall days wore on, each one bringing some new beauty and gladness into Nan's life. It was all like a fairy-tale; the pretty, soft dresses hanging in her wardrobe; the dainty boots and furs and mufflers and gloves; the chicken and oysters and cream, and goodies generally, with which Mother Bunch was always tempting her; the walks, the drives, the romps with Uncle Jack; the warmth, the shelter, and, oh, the strong, protecting love above, beneath, around all. For many little girls, this sunshine would have banished every shadow of the past, and they would gladly have forgotten the dreary days in the little cabin on the hill, with all their want and worry and work.

But though Nan's cheeks grew round and rosy, and her eyes lost their troubled look, there was a little cry, never stilled in her faithful heart.

"Patsy, oh, what was Patsy doing without

her? Was Milly making and mending and caring for her nursling? Was Uncle Jack's three hundred dollars spent yet?"

And in her sleep the old burdens would fall upon Nan, and she would wake from troubled dreams of Finnegan's bill and the empty larder, and start from her downy pillows thinking it was time to go to Mrs. Carter's and work for Patsy's coach. Then, as her waking gaze fell upon her beautiful room, with its sunny draperies and gleaming firelight, she would whisper to herself, almost with a sob:

"Oh Patsy! my poor, little, lame Patsy, if he were only here too, safe and happy and warm! O poor little Patsy! Maybe he is hungry and lonely and cold, while I have all this."

And Nan's faithful little heart would ache sorely, and her eyes would fill with tears that only the angels could see.

Meanwhile, as all adjustments to strange conditions are more or less awkward, Nan's

new life had its adventures, and some of them were of quite an exciting character, as we shall see.

She had been four weeks at Oakhurst, and it was November. For several days there had been a dreary rain, and it seemed as if indeed

“ The melancholy days had come  
The saddest of the year,”

when suddenly, with a warm burst of the south wind, came the beautiful St. Martin's summer, and all the dreariness without woke into strange sweetness and light.

A golden haze rested upon the bare, brown earth; the air was filled with spicy perfumes; the birds paused in their southward flight to sing again in the leafless groves; even a few little trusting violets opened their blue eyes in the sheltered hollows.

It was such a season as perhaps comes to dear old grandmamma, when, seated in her chimney-corner, her knitting drops for a while from her hands, and, with a

faint flush upon her wrinkled face, she feels again the touch of baby fingers, hears the prattle of baby lips, and forgets that the frost has touched all life's flowers, and that she is old and feeble and gray.

But our Nan was no grandmother, but a very lively little woman of twelve, for whom St. Martin's summer, with its sweet, dreamy spell, had an especial bewitchment.

Uncle Jack had gone to town, and, as Uncle Jack always came back from town with some delightful surprise for his little girl, Nan found his trips cityward occasions for pleasant reflection.

Would it be a canary-bird, or a shaggy poodle, to-day? Uncle Jack had dropped hints of both. Or perhaps—perhaps a pony, *the* pony which she had heard him discussing with Mat—a pony that never shied or stumbled or kicked or departed in any way from the narrow path of pony virtue, and that could be trusted to carry a little girl safe as if she were in her mother's arms. That was the

sort of pony for which Uncle Jack was looking, and Nan had grave doubts whether it could be found in this wicked world.

But life was bright enough without a pony to-day, with the bare hills all veiled in golden mists, the river flashing and dimpling under the penciled tracery of the leafless boughs, as if daring old Jack Frost to lay his touch upon its dancing waves, grim old Jack who was lying in wait upon the mountain, with icy gyves in his pitiless hands even now.

The water had a wonderful fascination for Nan, and since her coming to Oakhurst she had been out in the little rowboat almost daily with either Uncle Jack or Mat, who had taught her already to handle the oars. But Uncle Jack was away, and Mat busy to-day pottering around the greenhouse that had been somewhat damaged by the recent storm. Trusting to her newly acquired skill, Nan jumped into the little boat that lay tossing at its moorings under the alders, and, loosening the rope, paddled down the stream.

There was scarcely need of an oar, so lightly and swiftly was she borne over the dancing waves, in gay unconsciousness of the deep undertone in their murmur, the strong voice of many waters sweeping down from the mountains, where rill and streamlet were swollen into foaming torrents by the heavy November rains. On and on swept the little cockle-shell of a skiff, as Nan fondly believed, under her guiding helm and oar, while the warm south wind tossed the curls beneath her sailor hat, and the sunbeams kissed her cheek into a deeper rose, and the voice of the waters grew hoarser and louder as the river heard the call of the sea.

How long Nan rowed on she never knew, for in the delight and novelty of the situation she took no account of passing time. At last a darkening of the sky, a freshening of the wind, warned her she had better turn home. But in vain she tried to steer her little boat up stream. It only spun round and round in the swift current that had so gaily carried

her down. Nan's little wrists were wiry, and she bent sturdily to oar and helm, but it would have taken a man's strength and skill to breast the fierce downward rush of the swollen stream. And the sky was growing darker each moment; the light clouds, that had glimmered like snow-capped mountains in the sunlight, now rose into great, black, frowning ridges, that flashed and muttered ominously. The frightened little sailor made another desperate effort to steer her boat, but the oar snapped beneath her hand, the little skiff whirled round like a teetotum in the whitening waves, as with a crash and blaze the great black clouds opened fire, and Nan was adrift in the storm.

## CHAPTER VI.

### NEW FRIENDS.

ON and on, through roar and flash and blinding rain and spray, swept the little skiff, a mere cockle-shell at the mercy of the storm, while Nan could only cling to the sides of the boat, and pray as she had never prayed in her life before.

Ah, she was lost; she was *lost*; she was going to die, to drown here on these storm-swept waves. Uncle Jack would never see her again.

“O dear Father in heaven! have mercy upon me, spare me, save me! Mother Mary, pray for me now—now at the hour of my death.” As the sweet familiar words rose into a despairing cry, a hoarse shout sounded through the storm. “Help, help, oh, help!” shrieked Nan.

“Aye, aye, lass!” came the answer. And a boat manned by two stalwart rowers shot alongside of Nan, a powerful hand seized her little skiff and whirled it to the left, and the next moment both boats had grounded on a low-lying point of willow-girded shore.

“Out wid ye, Con,” said a familiar voice. “Ye’ve got two good legs under ye and can lift the little craythur. She must be nigh dead wid the fright and wet.”

“Oh, no, no; I’m not dead, Mat. Dear Mat, I’m all—all right,” sobbed Nan, hysterically.

“God be praised,” said Mat fervently. “An’ it’s a bad chase ye guv me, Miss. Faix, whin I saw the boat gone, I knew you were in it, and the heart fairly lepped out of me. It’s a fine sailor ye are to be, stharging off in the face of a storm like that.”

“O Mat, dear Mat! it—it was so good of you to come,” sobbed Nan, as, leaning on her two faithful guides, she stumbled on through the bending, shivering trees.

“Wasn’t it the Captain’s orthers that I was to pilot ye, Miss, and faix, if ye ever needed a pilot, it was this same day. Aisy, Miss, darlint, don’t cry. Shure, isn’t all the throuble over, and ye safe ashore wid me and Con howlding on till ye? Aisy, now, here’s General Lambert’s house to the fore of us, and ye’ll be as welcome there as the flowers of May, for it’s him and the Captain are the great friends intirely.”

And in a few moments Nan found herself on the broad porch of a hospitable old-fashioned house, whose doors flew open at once to the storm-cast guests, who were ushered into a big hall, that was bright with firelight and pictures and merry, laughing boys and girls, who left their games and music and dolls and books to crowd around the little stranger with eager sympathy. Then there was a tall, soldierly papa, who gave hearty welcome to Uncle Jack’s little girl, and a sweet, low-voiced mamma, who took the still trembling Nan away to be dosed and dried, and dressed

in a pretty little plaid frock, in which she was quite comfortable. And then Mat and Con were sent off in the General's light wagon to tell Uncle Jack when he came back from town that Nan was perfectly safe, and would stay with Mrs. Lambert all night.

Then such a jolly supper as they had. How the jokes flew up and down the long table, and papa stumped Hugh on his Latin, and cornered Dick in history, and set all their wits to work on the queer question:

“What king sat up for three hundred years after his death?”

Oh, what a pleasant evening! It was the most delightful Nan had ever spent, for it was her first glimpse of that heaven of childhood—a happy home, blessed by a father's tender care, a mother's loving smile. General Lambert was a very important man, indeed. Though the old sword that hung over the mantel was draped in the conquered banner, its owner's voice was still heard in the councils of the nation, and his sweet, low-

voiced wife held her place at will in the highest social circles of the land. Generations of stately ancestors looked down from their tarnished frames on the big wainscoted hall, where papa led the merry game of hide-and-seek with as much zest as if he were scouting again along the Rappahannock, and mamma, who had been a pupil of the great Abbé Liszt, dashed off such dance music, that even old Uncle Ned was beguiled into a rheumatic hoe-down in the kitchen hall.

Finally, when every one was tired of fun and frolic, Uncle Ned heaped more logs on the fire, and brought in apples and nuts, and the boys flung themselves on the furry hearth-rug, and Ethel and Nellie snuggled up to Nan on the big cushioned divan, and Loulie, who was the frail little blossom of the household, nestled at mamma's feet, and six-year-old Charlie bestrode papa's knee, and there came a clamor for stories.

"A nice, fighting story," commanded Charlie, who still ruled as Prince Baby,

“about guns and shooting, and bears and lions, and Indians.”

“No, no,” said papa, with a glance at the little stranger. “No bears and Indians tonight. Somebody has had excitement enough to keep her awake now.”

“Let’s have a Thanksgiving story, then. Thursday will be Thanksgiving,” said Dick. “Something about a rousing football match that you have seen, father.”

“I must leave that to younger chaps,” said the General. “Football wasn’t the fashionable game when I was young. It was musket-ball, rifle-ball, cannon-ball, then. And the luck was pretty hard on the catchers, and the touchdowns did not often get up. But I will tell you a story that I don’t think you have ever heard. It’s about a Thanksgiving dinner a long time ago.”

“Hundreds and hundreds of years!” said Charlie, gleefully, scenting giants and fairies in this promising opening.

“Well, not quite as long as that,” contin-

ued papa, "but pretty long as young people count. There was a boy soldier, not much older than Hugh here, imprisoned in a Northern fortress, with rather a grim look-out on every side; for the wide, deep waters of a great harbor washed the frowning walls of his prison. In the great city beyond there were none to give him help with voice or hand; far from friends and home, he was facing death—a stern, soldier's death. It was in the darkest hour of the Civil War, when bitter feeling prevailed on both sides, when brother was armed against brother, and friend steeled against friend. Ah, my boys, remember, there is no quarrel like a family quarrel. If in the days that are to come you ever get into a tiff, don't let the sun go down upon it, but shake hands and forget. To go back to my soldier boy, he was, as you see, in a pretty bad fix; for his father, who held high rank in the Confederate army, had prisoners in his hands that by some stern reprisal of war were threatened with death, and the lad

(for he was little more) was held as hostage for their safety. He knew the lofty sense of honor that ruled his father, and that no thought of the boy he so dearly loved could move him from his duty as a soldier and a chief."

"Tough on the poor old dad," said Hugh, softly. "But it was square," interposed Dick, "tit for tat. It was square, wasn't it, papa?"

"Well, it didn't look just that way to the young prisoner on this particular Thanksgiving Eve, when he stood at his barred window and looked across the waters to the great city, with its domes and towers flashing in the frosty sunlight. Life and hope were strong within him, and rose in fierce rebellion to his fate. If he could but have a chance—a leap from that barred window, a plunge into the deep waters, a race over those far-off hills! He thought of his home, where the brown hills were still bright with autumn glory, the river was dimpling in the Southern

breeze, the sky a vault of cloudless blue. He saw again in fancy the big house, with the red creeper twining around the porch pillars, and the flash of the log-fire on the hearth, where his mother was waiting for news of her only boy; and, big boy as he was, his eyes got misty, and a lump rose in his throat as he thought that he would never see home or mother again—never see the hills or the river, or the old box-bordered garden, where he and his pretty cousin May had picked posies to pin on her white dress or nestle in her curly brown hair—sweet Cousin May, who had been like a sister to him until two years before, when her mother had taken her off to Europe to finish her education. And the young soldier wondered if Cousin May, who was quite a grand young lady now, and had earls and counts and all sorts of great people at her feet, would give a thought to his hard fate. Somehow the lump in his throat grew harder to swallow when he thought of being quite forgotten by Cousin May.”

A little smile was trembling upon mamma's lips, and her hand stole softly into the big soldier hand that rested upon the General's chair as the story-teller went on.

"Just then, as the soldier boy was feeling his worst, there was a thump at his door, and in came one of his guard, with a letter, that had been opened and inspected as usual by the officer of the day. It was about the meanest, the coldest, the cruelest letter the boy had ever read, and it was from his Cousin May."

"O the hateful thing!" chorused the girls, indignantly.

"She told him she had just returned from Europe, and was visiting her father's old friend, General Gray," continued papa; "that she had learned with great regret that her cousin had been taken in arms against his country and flag; that, though she could feel no sympathy with a traitor, and all friendship between them was forever over, she would like in some way to return the kind-

nesses received from his mother in the past; therefore, General Gray had kindly obtained permission for her to send him some little delicacies for a Thanksgiving dinner. She begged he would not reply to this note in any way, as further communication with him under present circumstances was neither allowable nor desirable. Accompanying this note, which fell like an ice-bolt on the poor boy's heart, was a fine roast turkey, with its usual appendages of celery and cranberry sauce, and a small keg of prime oysters."

"I'd have pitched the whole mess overboard," flashed out Dick, indignantly. "To kick a fellow when he is down with a letter like that!"

"My boy, you have never been on army rations for a twelvemonth," said his father, grimly. "It had been so long since that fellow had seen a turkey or an oyster, that, instead of pitching them out, he set to work vigorously to pitch them in. And it was about the best Thanksgiving dinner he ever

had before or has ever had since, for that roast turkey was a traitorous bird, stuffed with watch-spring saws and greenbacks by Cousin May's rebel fingers, and, hidden safe under those prime oysters, was a life-preserving suit of rubber, ready to be blown into shape. And two nights after that Thanksgiving dinner, the bars of that soldier boy's cell were sawed through, and he leaped into the water and he swam to the friends Cousin May had waiting for him."

"Then what—what did she write that hateful letter for?" asked Nellie, in amazement.

"To fool the officer on guard, so that he would not suspect or inspect her gifts," said papa, laughing.

"And didn't she ever pick posies in the soldier boy's garden any more?" asked Charlie.

"Ask her," said the General, as he whirled the young rider around to face his smiling mother.

“O mamma, mamma!” shouted an uproarious chorus. “Mamma was Cousin May. The story is about mamma and papa!”

“Of course it is,” said Hugh. “I guessed it from the first; but why have we never heard it before?”

“Because good old General Gray was your godfather, and your mother never let him know how she tricked him into helping me off. It would have been a bitter pill to the old man even to his dying day. Ah, she was a wicked little witch at seventeen—this same mamma of yours. Neither old salt nor old soldier could resist her.”

“And she is a witch still—the sweetest witch in all the world,” said gallant Hugh, lifting his mother’s hand to his lips. “She holds us all in a spell that nothing can ever break. You need never be afraid of tiffs here, father, while we remember you and our mother.”

“Good, my boy, good!” And the General’s voice softened into unusual tenderness

as he slapped his favorite son's broad shoulder. "‘In Union is Strength.’ That's the motto of these glorious latter days. Strength of heart—strength of homes—strength of States! So, the Union forever, Charlie boy!"

"And three cheers for the Red, White, and Blue!" chirped Charlie, as his father swung him from his knee. "Sing, mamma, sing ‘Red, White, and Blue’ before we go to bed."

And as the stirring strain of the old song was upborne by the children's clear voices, the "soldier boy" of long ago listened with a strange thrill in his heart, that was half gladness and half sorrow, half triumph and half pain.

## CHAPTER VII.

### AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

UNCLE JACK drove over to Lambert Hall very early next morning to find his truant and bring her home.

“You must let us see more of your little girl,” said Mrs. Lambert, who had heard something of Nan’s story, and felt a mother’s pity for the little stranger, whose life until now had been so hard and sad.

“I shall be only too glad to do so,” said the Captain, gratefully. “My motherless Nan could ask no better friends, madam, than you and yours.”

And thus began a pleasant intimacy between Lambert Hall and Oakhurst, even though they stood six miles apart. With boats, bicycles, and ponies at their disposal,

the young folks managed to cover the distance very much oftener than Miss Darrell, the young Lamberts' governess, approved.

Miss Darrell, who had been absent on a Thanksgiving-week holiday when Nan made her first appearance at the Hall, was a highly cultivated lady, in gold-rimmed spectacles, who had the strong opinions that in simple-minded folks are called bitter prejudices. She found Nan's grammar and religion equally shocking.

"My dear Mrs. Lambert," she said, dropping into that lady's sitting-room, one evening, after a visit with Ethel to Oakhurst, "are you aware that this new-made friend of Ethel's is a Romanist?"

"Is she?" exclaimed Mrs. Lambert. "And does Captain Leighton allow it?"

"Most certainly," answered Miss Darrell, impressively. "He not only allows it, but sends her to church or chapel, or Mass, or whatever they call it, with a rough one-legged Irish sailor." And Miss Darrell drew a long

breath, as if the shocking recountal had quite exhausted her.

"Poor little Nan a Catholic!" repeated Mrs. Lambert, softly. "That accounts for the innocence in her eyes. I felt that her little soul had been shielded somehow."

Miss Darrell stared. There were times when she found the sweet-voiced lady of the house quite incomprehensible even to her cleverness.

"I thought it right you should know at once," she continued. "The poor child's grammar is bad enough, and I fear Ethel will become careless about her verbs and participles if she is much with her."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Lambert, laughing. "Her participles can't be worse than my old mammy's, and they never hurt me. And don't tell the children, Miss Darrell, but I never parsed a sentence in my life. I always found grammar odious. And yet," added the lady, with a little shrug of her pretty shoulders, "people say I talk quite creditably."

To which Miss Darrell could only agree, for she knew this soft-voiced little lady was considered one of the brightest and most charming hostesses of the land.

“But, the religion! Ethel tells me that Nan invited her to come to church with her next Sunday. There is to be a Forty Hours’ or something. I did not exactly catch what,” continued Miss Darrell, eagerly. “I felt sure you would object.”

“Not at all,” was the startling reply. “Let Ethel go if she pleases. The dearest friend I ever had is a nun in a French convent now. And I could ask nothing better than to have my daughter such a woman as Aglae Fontaine. I would have been a Catholic myself if I had spent another year at Aglae’s side. Luckily, or unluckily perhaps, mamma whisked me home. But I have always been glad that I knelt with Aglae to get that dear old Pope Pio Nino’s blessing. I have fancied that it has rested on my heart and home ever since.”

So Ethel went to church with the little "Romanist," and her one-legged pilot, and came home with her soft eyes shining like stars, to tell mamma of the beautiful altar, the lights, the music, and the little white-robed children scattering flowers in the procession of the Forty Hours, all of which was to her so wonderful and new.

"O mamma! it was just like heaven. It made me feel so good and happy. I never felt so good in all my life before. And Nan said it was because Our Lord was really there, really and truly as when He let the little children come to him on earth. Sister Seraphine told her all about it. O mamma! I never heard anything like that. Did you?"

And mamma's sweet face grew very thoughtful as she answered:

"Yes, dear, I did, a long time ago. But there are some things too great and solemn for a little girl to understand. Don't trouble your dear little head about them, but run and play."

And thus mamma silenced the uneasy whisper that rose in her heart when she thought of Aglae and the long ago, and sent her questioning little girl back to Miss Darrell—Miss Darrell, who had dived into so many ologies and isms that she was really worse than a good, old-fashioned pagan, and who was not quite sure whether she had been transmigrated from a cat or evolved from a tadpole; Miss Darrell, who was ready to believe anything and everything but the sweet old faith Our Lord came to teach.

\* \* \* \* \*

Meantime Nan was improving her long holiday by learning many things by methods unknown to Miss Darrell.

First, there was the Sunday-school, which Mat always contrived that his young lady should reach, and the sweet-faced teacher, Miss Alice, who took especial interest in the bright little scholar from Oakhurst; then there was Mat himself, who was a very encyclopedia of knowledge about birds and beasts,

and snakes and flowers and trees; Mat, who loved nothing better than to hold forth to his eager young listener about the queer lands to which he had journeyed, and the queer people he had seen; Mat, who had made hair-breadth escapes from the jaws of sharks and alligators, and had just missed serving as a substantial roast at a cannibal feast. Wertha, too, had wonderful stories for her young mistress, of that far-off Northland from which she came, of the long, strange day, its midnight sun. And Mother Bunch—good old Mother Bunch's budget of tales was quite inexhaustible, for she had lived in great houses abroad, and could tell of their state and splendor; she had helped to dress Lady Maude for her presentation at court; she had nursed the little Earl of Copton Court through the whooping-cough and measles; she had shrouded the great Lady Blank, for whose death a nation had mourned; she had all sorts of traditions about what young ladies should and should not do, from the

brushing of their hair to the tying of their slippers. Ah, to a little, unkempt, motherless waif Mother Bunch's teachings were quite invaluable. Last, but not least, there was Uncle Jack, who knew, as Nan fondly believed, everything, all secrets of the skies, the stars, the winds; who could point out all the countries of the world on the great globe in his library, and who had invented for his little girl's benefit a most fascinating game, by which Nan was soon able to steer an imaginary ship to every port on the earth, and take up the fitting cargo.

Really, Oakhurst was not such a bad school, after all, for a poor little girl whose life had been narrowed down to the drudgery of a hillside cabin, and who had learned so little of the bright, beautiful world in which she lived that she had never known whether it was round or flat. So the bright days sped on, until Jack Frost came down from the heights in earnest, and the wind blustered down the wide chimneys of Oak-

hurst, and lawns and gardens were white with snow.

“Nan, Nan!” cried Ethel, bursting into the hall, one December afternoon, “put on your things, quick. We’ve got the big sleigh at the door, and we are all going in town to the Orphans’ Fair. The boys say it’s almost as good as the circus, so mamma has sent us with Miss Darrell, and we’ve stopped to get you.”

“O Uncle Jack! may I go?” asked Nan, who was in the library, over the big globe, making a Polar expedition with her imaginary ship, and getting locked up in the ice-floes.

“Certainly,” was the hearty reply. “And here is a little pocket-piece to take with you,” added Uncle Jack, slipping a five-dollar gold piece in her hand. “Spend it all. It’s for the orphans, you know.”

Even Miss Darrell’s gold-rimmed glasses could not detract from the hilarity of the occasion, as the young people passed into the

crowded hall, gay with flags, banners, Turkish booths, Chinese pagodas, Rebecca's well, and every device to tempt pennies and dimes out of juvenile pockets. Admission was only ten cents, so there was a motley crowd. Miss Darrell kept the younger members of her flock by her side, but Ethel and Nan were allowed to wander at will, making their purchases. They had stopped to inspect a tobacco-bag, which they thought just the thing for Uncle Jack, when Nan heard her name called in a shrill, familiar tone, and turned to face Milly!—Milly, quite gorgeous in a suit of purple and green plaid, with her hay-colored frizzes surmounted by a red felt hat nodding with yellow roses—the Milly Farley of old.

“O you dear, sweet child!” And Nan was caught in the embrace of two purple and green arms, and kissed rapturously.

For a moment she was struck quite dumb with surprise, for in all the five years of their acquaintance Milly, sharp-tongued, nagging

Milly, had scarcely ever given poor little drudging Nan a civil word, and this effusive greeting was in every way startling. Then the sight of the familiar face stirred up all the tender memories of Nan's faithful little heart, and she found voice to answer:

"O Milly! I am so glad to see you. Ethel, this is my old friend, Milly Farley."

"Friend!" echoed Milly. "Friend ain't no name for what we was to each other. We was like sisters, wasn't we, Nan? But I suppose you've forgot all that, now that times is so changed with you. You've forgotten how mother took you from—well, we won't say where, and did for you like you was her own child."

"Oh, no, no," answered Nan, quite regardless of the malice and envy in the speaker's words. "I haven't forgotten anything, Milly. I've been thinking of you all, and dreaming of you, and longing to hear from you so much, oh, so much. Tell me everything. Tell me what you are doing here, and who

is taking care of the children and the house? How could you leave them, Milly?"

"Easy enough," said Milly. "We've broken up housekeeping."

"Broken up housekeeping!" echoed Nan, aghast.

"Yes," answered Milly, loftily, proceeding, as she thought, to impress Nan's "stuck-up" friend. "Father thought it best. Really, the care was so great for me, and we found it so difficult to get good servants, so we sold the old home. You know what a dear, sweet place it was, Nan? And father and the little boys are boarding, now."

"Where?" asked Nan, breathlessly.

"In Frostburg. Father is in business there, now; and I—I am visiting friends here in town," added Milly, feeling it unnecessary to add that her friends were tailors who employed her to finish coats.

"And Tim?" queried Nan, who had a soft place in her heart even for the big black sheep of the family.

“Oh, Tim is at work, too,” answered Milly.  
“He left home months ago.”

“And Patsy, my poor little Patsy. O Milly!” Nan’s voice trembled, “do you think he is happy? Does he miss me much?”

“Miss you! O dear, no,” answered Milly, with a short, hard laugh. “He don’t miss anybody. He has such good times, now in a great big house, with other children to play with, and everybody petting and humoring him. The child is fairly spoiled to death.”

“And—and does he look well, Milly?” asked Nan, joyfully, feeling that this beatific state of things was all due to Uncle Jack’s three hundred dollars.

“Oh, just splendid,” continued Milly, bravely upholding the family credit before Nan’s new friends. “So fat and so rosy, I declare, when I saw him in his dear little winter suit, all trimmed with fur, he looked like a picture.”

“Oh, I am so glad, so glad,” Nan almost

sobbed, in delight. "I was so afraid he was lonesome and unhappy. I've had such dreams about him. O Milly! you can't think what dreadful dreams—"

"Ethel!" called a stern, icy voice, and Miss Darrell glared in horror upon the group. "I am surprised at *you*, to say the least. Come, we are going home at once."

"O Miss Darrell! so soon," said Nan.

"At once," repeated the lady, shutting her lips tightly and looking arctic blizzards at Milly's red hat and nodding roses.

"Then I must go," said Nan. "So, good-by, dear, dear Milly, good-by. Oh, I'm so glad I met you! Give my love to them all, Tim and Dave, and my own darling little Patsy, and tell them"—Nan's voice began to tremble—"tell them I'll never forget them, or stop loving them, never, never—oh, oh, oh, never!"

And quite unconscious of the wondering and staring and tittering around her, Uncle Jack's pretty, stylish little girl clung to

shock-haired Milly, sobbing out her tender, faithful heart on the purple-plaid breast.

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“Such a scene, my dear Mrs. Lambert,” said Miss Darrell, as, quite pale with rage, she recounted her adventures. “Everybody staring and wondering and asking *me* who that dreadful-looking girl was, and why I was separating them. Never will I take that little vulgarian anywhere again—never, never, never.”

And Miss Darrell kept her word.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A TOBOGGAN SLIDE.

UNCLE JACK'S face darkened when he heard of the scene at the Fair, but he had not the heart to reproach the little girl, who was so full of unselfish delight at the good news she had heard of her old friends.

"You did it, dear Uncle Jack, you did it. Patsy is happy and warm and comfortable, and they've got everything they want, and the money you gave them did it all. Oh, I've been so troubled and worried, Uncle Jack; but now I can be happy, real happy."

And the roses deepened on Nan's cheeks, and the light grew brighter in her eyes, and her voice grew merrier every day.

"Mrs. Bunch has fairly won her watch," said Uncle Jack, pinching his little girl's cheek, as she danced into his study, one De-

ember morning. "I don't think there's a prettier pair of winter roses in the country. What do you say to a sleigh-ride with me, this fine, snappy morning? I've got some business at 'Squire Long's, and will take you if you want to go."

"Oh, yes, yes," answered Nan, gleefully. And soon she was nestling happily in the great bearskins at Uncle Jack's side, and skimming over the white hills, through the pine forests hung with snow blossoms, over the bridge, beneath which the frozen river slumbered, on and on, through the still, beautiful fairyland that old wizard Winter rules with his crystal wand.

"Oh, isn't it lovely?" said Nan, half under her breath. "I never thought snow was nice before."

"Didn't you?" laughed Uncle Jack. "I thought all young folks liked snow. It means snowballing and coasting, and all kinds of fun."

"It didn't mean fun to me," answered

Nan, the old, wistful look stealing into her bright eyes. "It choked up the doors and leaked down the chimneys, filled up the well, and covered up the wood-pile, and everything got scarce, and Patsy's back ached—"

"Oh, come, come," said Uncle Jack, gruffly, "we've bargained not to talk or think of those bad days now. Snow means fun now, capital fun, as you will see when Will Long takes you down his toboggan-slide to-day."

And Uncle Jack began to tell stories of sledding and coasting in various climes, until Nan's eyes sparkled with interest again, and she looked around at the spotless, shining slopes with the gladness at their beauty that was among the sweetest lessons of her new life.

Suddenly out of the purity and peace of the scene arose an ugly picture, a grim, gray house, whose barred windows and spiked walls seemed to frown down upon the white loveliness all around it.

“O Uncle Jack!” asked Nan, “what is that horrid place?”

“That is the county prison, my little girl; an ugly place, indeed, but really much better than it looks.”

“A prison! O Uncle Jack! are many people locked up in it?”

“Quite a number, I believe,” answered Uncle Jack, carelessly. “But they are not always locked up. They are made to work—cut wood, dig ditches, make roads. There is a party of them now.” And he pointed to a gang of men in striped clothes who were shoveling away the great snow drifts that choked the neighboring road.

“O poor, poor men!” said Nan, pitifully. “I am so sorry for them. Aren’t you, Uncle Jack?”

“Not a bit, Nan. They deserve all they get, I am sure, and a great deal more, for they are proved thieves and rascals, every one of them. Here is ’Squire Long’s! And whew!—just as I expected—what a tobog-

gan-slide! Will Long didn't go to school at Montreal without learning something." And jolly Uncle Jack who, like all good men, was still a boy at heart, reined up at the foot of the hill on which stood his friend's handsome house, to survey the hard-packed, glittering track that swept unbroken down the dazzling slope, and was gay with merry coasters.

"Now, there's snow-fun for you," he continued, as Will Long's big Canadian toboggan came skimming down, laden with pretty furred and hooded girls, followed by a great Russian sled, with brass hand-bars and jingling bells, while behind these heavy leaders whizzed a flock of single runners, and the white stillness of the snow echoed with glad shouts and calls and peals of silvery laughter, until the slide ended at the level road, where the stripe-clad prisoners were shoveling in sullen silence at the spotless drifts.

"O Uncle Jack!" breathlessly cried Nan,

who had risen up in her own sleigh with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes, "isn't it splendid fun? If I could just go down that slide once!"

"And you shall," said Uncle Jack, heartily. "Hallo, Will!" he called to the sturdy young fellow now dragging his toboggan up the hill. "My little Nan wants to try a slide with you. Can you take her down?"

"Why, certainly, a dozen times!" said Will, cordially. "Jump out, Miss, and you, too, Captain. Fine track, this morning, and we are having capital sport."

"So I see," answered the Captain, "but I am almost too old a boy for tobogganing, Will. Besides, I have business with your father, so I will leave my little girl with you for a while; and remember, whenever you want a horse or a boat, Oakhurst has both at your service."

"Thank you, Captain. You are the best of neighbors, as we boys all know," answered the lad.

And Uncle Jack drove off, leaving Nan to tug up the hill with Will and the gay crowd of sisters, cousins, aunts, and neighbors who formed his party.

Captain Leighton, the hearty, kindly, wealthy master of Oakhurst, was known to them all most favorably, and the pretty little girl in her sealskin cap and coat, was the subject of many pleasant whispered comments.

“Isn’t she a little beauty?”

“What glorious hair!”

“Looks like a little Russian princess!”

“No wonder, in a cap and coat like that,” said a bright-eyed cousin just “out.” “They must have cost as much as my whole year’s allowance. But Mrs. Lambert says her uncle fairly idolizes her. She is the child of his only sister, who died abroad, I believe, and this little girl was sent home to him about three months ago.”

Thus gossip, with its mingling of truth and falsehood, ran on, while Nan, packed safely between Will and Fanny Long, went

whizzing down the slide on the big toboggan, in a white, dazzling flight that fairly took away her breath.

Oh, what a glad, mad rush it was, this strong-winged sweep through the tingling, sunlit air!

One wild, delicious moment and a sharp-ringing shout, a shock, a swirl of blinding snow, and Nan found herself half-stifled in a huge drift, with everybody more or less scattered around her.

“Oh!” she gasped, as with Will’s help she floundered up from the fleecy, snowy depths, “I—I didn’t know you came down like—like this.”

“We don’t,” he laughed. “We ran down one of the jail-birds. Confound it, what did you get straight in my track for?” he added, irritably, to one of the striped figures who was struggling painfully up from an evident knock-down in the road.

But the man, who was holding both hands to his head, did not answer.

"He has been acting like a fool all day," said the foreman of the gang, slipping forward. "He was sent down only last week, and he seems dazed like. He is a young chap, and it's his first time. Get up here, 24! You are not hurt."

"Oh, yes, he is, he is," said warm-hearted, fearless little Nan. "His head is all cut and bleeding, and—" She stopped suddenly, and her rosy cheek grew white as the snow around, for the prisoner's hands had dropped from his face at the sound of her voice.

"Nan!" he said, hoarsely. "Is it Nan?"

"Tim!" she gasped, while the white hills seemed to spin in a dizzy dance around her, for it was, indeed, the big black sheep of the Farley family. "Oh, it's Tim!"

And to the consternation of all beholders, the little heiress of Oakhurst went down on her knees in the snow, and began to staunch the blood from the jail-bird's cut temple with her dainty handkerchief.

"Oh, he is hurt, dreadfully hurt!" she cried, in heart-broken tones.

"Please, somebody, get a doctor to help him, please, please! I'll pay for it. I've got plenty of money in my pocket. Please, please."

"Lor', missy, he don't want no doctor," said the foreman. "Get up, you fool. You've only got a little scratch. Don't be frightening the little lady."

"I ain't no little lady," cried Nan, desperately in her efforts to prove her right to help. "I'm only little Nan Knowlton, and Tim was like my brother, my real brother. Weren't you, Tim? He was good to me, and sawed wood and drew water for me, and bought me a pair of shoes with his own money when I had frosted feet. Oh, please, somebody, call Uncle Jack. He will do something for Tim, I know."

Nan had a startled audience by this time. Coasters and convicts alike had gathered around. Will Long stood quite speechless, his pretty sisters and cousins stared aghast,

while this little "Russian princess" claimed friendship, if not kinship, with a rough jail-bird in his striped coat of shame. And just then, as if to cap the climax, Uncle Jack's sleigh swept down the curve of the neighboring road.

"Well, little woman, all ready?" rang out the cheery greeting. "Why—hallo! what in thunder is the matter here?"

"One of our gang got hurt with a sled," explained the foreman, as Captain Leighton stared in dumb amazement at the scene, "and the little lady there seems to know him. She is taking on dreadful about it."

"Nan!" called Uncle Jack sharply, in a tone she had never heard from him before, "Nan!"

"O Uncle Jack, Uncle Jack!" Nan faltered, "it's Tim, Uncle Jack, *our* Tim."

Then did Tim himself put an end to the scene by struggling to his feet.

"Don't—don't bother about me, Nan," he said, huskily. "I ain't wuth it. I ain't

wuth nuthing. Here, take me off, boss, somewhere—fur—fur—I can't—can't stand this—no more. Take me off."

And the big black sheep, who was not all black at heart, was led staggering away, while Uncle Jack, after explaining as briefly as possible that his little girl had known the luckless Tim in his better days, lifted the still weeping Nan back into the sleigh and drove home in a fierce, gloomy silence that told her more plainly than words that he was sorely displeased.

He left her at Oakhurst, her little heart and head both aching pitifully, and drove away again alone.

Not until the next day did he call her to him again in the old tender tone.

"Nan," he said, from his study, "come here. I want to talk with you."

As she entered shyly, he put his arm about her and drew her close to his chair.

"I was angry with you, yesterday—hot, fierce, old Leighton angry, Nan. Don't

make me angry like that again, little girl—never again.”

“O Uncle Jack! no, no—not if I can help it—no.”

“Because when I am angry I am a wild, hot-headed old fool, Nan, and can’t answer for what I say or what I do. But I’ve got my wits back again, to-day. I’ve settled about that young rascal Farley. He was only locked up because he fell in with a gang of old thieves and cutthroats, who fooled the stupid lad into helping them off with their stolen goods. I think we can manage to get him out in a week, and then ship him off somewhere to start square again.”

“O Uncle Jack! dear Uncle Jack!” said Nan, flinging her arms tight about his neck. “You’re so good—so good!”

But Uncle Jack’s voice grew suddenly stern and hard: “Remember, Nan, this ends the Farley business. They are nothing to you. Worse than nothing, for they made you

their little slave and drudge. I don't want you ever to see, to hear from, to think of them again. If you do—well, I am afraid we will quarrel, little girl, and Uncle Jack's quarrels don't always end—in a kiss—like this."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE STORM BURSTS.

PLEASANT days followed this little outbreak, and though dimly Nan realized that, like the fair Ellen in the poem, "her hand was in the lion's mane," Uncle Jack was his own loving self again. For Christmas was close at hand, and he determined it should be a happy one for the little girl who had never known a "Merry Christmas" before.

A great tree was to rise in the hall, all the little neighbors were to be invited, and many were the consultations held over the library fire about fitting presents for young and old: whether Ethel should have a portfolio or paint-box; Charlie, a rocking-horse or a tool-chest; Nellie, a mandolin or a ring.

What Nan was to have herself, she scarcely dared think; but she had caught hints

from Mat, who could not keep a secret, of a little fairy-carriage and a pair of milk-white ponies that were on their way from Santa Claus Land for somebody he knew.

It seemed almost like a dream—a wonderful, beautiful dream, and Nan felt sometimes as if she must pinch herself right hard and wake—wake to find herself under the ragged patchwork quilt of the old hillside cabin, with the snow leaking in from the roof, and Patsy crying with bad pains in his poor little legs. “But it’s all true, true, true!” Nan’s grateful little heart sang delightfully. “And Patsy is warm and comfortable and happy. Milly said so. Oh, I’m sure I could not enjoy all these beautiful times if Milly had not told me my little Patsy was well and happy, too. Oh, it’s so nice to think of his having a new warm coat and plenty to eat, and getting rosy and fat and strong.” And just then Nan, who was skipping gaily over the white frozen road, after accompanying Ethel to the Oakhurst gate, came to a sud-

den pause by the high, snow-wreathed hedge, for Uncle Jack's voice was sounding in awful thunder from the path near by.

“Clear out of these grounds! Clear out, I say, you miserable, drunken scoundrel. You shall not see the child—I swear you shall not. Didn't I pay you to keep out of my sight and out of hers?”

“You did, Captain Leighton, you did.”

Nan's breath nearly left her, for it was Dad's voice that answered, in the husky, quavering tones that usually followed an evening at Finnegan's.

“But I've been the poor, unfortunate man iver since me wife, God rest her, was tuk frum me; and I take a dhrop too much now and thin, I don't deny; and I got in with villyuns that robbed me and chated me of all that I had, your honor; and me little place was tuk for back rint; and atwixt the cowl'd and the sickness and all, I haven't a dollar left. But it isn't that brings me here to-day. It's to have a word with Nan.

Shure, I know her tindhers heart is warm to us yit, sur, for wasn't she like me own child fur five years and more?"

"Are you going to get off this place?" roared Uncle Jack, made doubly savage by this reminiscence. "I warn you, if you try to come to my house, I'll loosen my dogs on you."

"O Uncle Jack! dear Uncle Jack! no, no," said Nan, springing forward. "Don't—don't hurt him, please."

"Nan!" said her uncle, sternly, "Nan!"

"Nan, darlint, Nan!" said Dad, and Nan heard the real grief quivering in his husky tone. "It's fur you I've come. Poor little Patsy is dying and calling for you."

"Dying!" echoed Nan, her rosy cheek paling. "Dying! Oh, no, no! Milly said he was well and strong."

"Then she lied," answered Dad, bitterly, "lied like the proud, hard-hearted girl she is. She turned her back on us in our trouble, and wouldn't do a hand's turn for the little

craythur; and it's dying he now is, wid cowl'd and hunger and heart-break, for he hasn't held up his head since you left him, three months ago. 'Nan! Nan!' it's his cry night and day. 'Oh, I want my own Nan! Won't she come to me, Dad? Won't she look at me wanst afore I die?' It's fur that I come, Captain Leighton," and Dad's voice was steadied into momentary dignity, "and not either for your dollars or dimes. It's to ax Nan to come with me and see my little Patsy afore—afore he goes."

"O Uncle Jack! yes, yes, I must, I must," said Nan, forgetful of all things in the grief and pain that wrung her heart. "O my little Patsy! my little Patsy, dying, dying! Oh! I ought never to have left him. I promised his mother to take care of him, and I came away and left him to die, to die! O Uncle Jack! why did you take me away? Why did you ever take me away?"

Perhaps, if Uncle Jack had been a real "father," he would have understood this

piteous little heart-cry. But he was an old bachelor, who had snapped the one tender tie of his life in a fit of anger, and since had been roughing it among men—a hot-headed, generous, strong-willed old bachelor, whose big heart, filled with proud, remorseful tenderness for his sister's little neglected girl, was stung almost to madness by the reproach in Nan's words.

“Why did I take you?” he thundered. “Because I was a fool—a blind, addle-pated, doting fool. Go back, you ungrateful little viper—go back, if you will, to the hole where I found you. I am done with you, as I was done with your mother before you. Go, I say!”

“Uncle Jack! O dear, dear Uncle Jack!” wailed Nan.

“Don't call me Uncle,” he answered, hoarsely. “Go with that drunken fool, if you please; but remember, if you do, you stay there—you stay. I am nothing to you—worse than nothing. Take that,” and he

flung a pocketbook at Dad's feet, "and begone—begone both of you! Never let me see you—never let me hear of you again!" And fairly blind with rage, Uncle Jack strode on into the house, leaving the little girl he had loved so dearly standing, white and stunned, at Dad's side. Poor, bewildered little Nan! Her head was turning, her heart bursting, the whole beautiful world into which Uncle Jack had lifted her seemed crumbling into ruins, in the fierce storm of his wrath; but through all the throbbing and whirling of heart and brain came the piteous echo of a little voice—Patsy's dying voice:

"Nan, Nan! come to me—come to me!"

"Och, murther, murther!" said Dad, fairly sobered by the outburst he had awakened. "Does he mane to turn ye out of this, Nan?"

"I—I don't know," answered Nan, with a long-drawn breath. "Oh, I don't know anything, except that Patsy, my poor little Patsy, is dying and wants me. Oh, take me to him, Dad, take me to him right now!"

“Shure, I will, God bless ye, I will, Nan!” replied Dad, lapsing into maudlin tears. “Bad luck to yer ould divil of an uncle, I’ll take you to the poor little craythur, that can’t die aisy till he sees ye. Come on, darlint, come on.”

And like one stunned by a blow, Nan walked in under the white ghosts of trees to the gate, where stood the old spavined horse and rude box-sleigh that had brought Dad to Oakhurst.

“It was a neighbor lent it to me, fur it’s a good tin miles we’ve got to go,” explained Dad, as he lifted Nan onto a heap of old sacking that formed the cushioned seat, and as they drove away the speaker continued to dwell on about the “hard luck” that had followed him since Nan’s departure; of the scoundrel, one Nick Downey, who had persuaded him to invest his three hundred dollars in a patent that was to bring in a fortune, and had decamped with all the money the following week; the trouble with Tim,

and the black cold-heartedness of Milly, who had left him to drift around with the two children from place to place, until they had at last found shelter in an old house on the hills beyond, where they could live rent free.

And as Nan heard, the beautiful life of the past three months seemed to fade away as if it had indeed been only a dream, and the old burdens fell back upon her, and she felt herself the poor little charity child, the household drudge, Patsy's caretaker and nurse, "Nan Nobody" again.

Grayer and colder grew the air, grayer and colder the gathering shadows, as the old horse went wheezing on up the sunny heights, until at last Dad pulled up before an old roofless house, standing drearily among the frozen hills, a house with broken windows and falling doors and tumbling chimneys. One corner had been patched up into a shelter scarcely fit for the beasts of the field, and a faint glimmer of light came through the cracked window.

“Dad, Dad!” cried a shrill little voice, and Dave sprang forward to meet the newcomers. But Nan scarcely gave her old aide-de-camp a glance or a word. With an icy pang of fear at her heart, she burst into the wretched room, where, stretched on a miserable pallet in the corner, lay a little skeleton form, with a tangle of golden hair and wild, feverish eyes.

“Patsy!” she cried, as he stared in bewilderment at the pretty little fur-robed figure before him. “Don’t you know me, Patsy boy?” And she tossed off her hat, and let the riotous curls tumble over her face.

“Nan, Nan!” the thin, sharp little voice rang out in a cry of rapture, as Patsy started up from his pillow and flung his trembling, wasted arms around his old friend’s neck. “Oh, you’ve come back to me, my Nan, my own Nan!”

And as Nan clasped the poor, little shrunken, piteous form to her faithful heart,

every thought of self vanished, and she took up her old life as simply as if the little heiress of Oakhurst had never been.

“My own little boy! Yes, I’ve come back to take care of you, Patsy; and now you are going to get well and strong.”

“Nan, Nan! Oh, I’m so cold, Nan, and the pains are so bad, and there ain’t been no one to rub me since you went away. Don’t leave me, Nan—don’t leave me no more. Oh, I am so scared and so cold, I thought I was going to die—just with Dave, alone.”

“He was a praying,” piped Dave, who looked only a little less pinched and starved than his brother—“praying the angels would send you back to him, Nan.”

“And they have,” answered Nan, as she winked the tears from her eyes. “And you are not going to be cold or sick or frightened any more, for I’m going to put this nice warm coat over you.” And Nan pulled off her Russian sealskin and disposed it over the puny little form. “And if Dave will get me

two or three sticks of wood, I'll have a fire here in a minute that's worth talking about. Stir about lively, Dave, and put on the kettle, if you can find one, for we are going to have supper."

"There ain't nothing but meal," said Dave, lugubriously. "We don't have no supper now, Nan."

"Oh, but we must have supper to-night. Isn't there a store anywhere?"

"There is, three miles back at the cross-roads," answered Dad, his dim eyes beginning to gleam. "And I've got the money your uncle give me. I'll go over wid the sleigh while I have it handy."

"Yes, yes," said Nan, eagerly, forgetting Dad's weakness in her anxiety for the starving children. "Go, Dad, please, quick, and bring us candles, and bread and sugar and tea, and milk, and wine if you can get it, and a piece of beef to make soup, and oranges, and, oh, everything you can pack in your sleigh, Dad, everything!"

“I will, I will,” said Dad. “There’s ten dollars in the pocketbook, and it will buy it all.”

“And we’ll have the kettle boiling by the time you come back,” said Nan, who was down on her knees, blowing the sputtering logs into a blaze, “and Patsy shall have some nice cream toast, and tea. So hurry, Dad, hurry, please.”

And Dad shuffled off on his errand, while the little lady of Oakhurst, with her pretty dress tucked up, her curls flying, and the old smudge back upon her rosy cheek, went flying around the wretched room, straightening and sweeping and smoothing until the logs burst into cheery flame, the rusty kettle began to sing blithely, poor little half-frozen Dave snuggled up delightedly to the warm hearth, while Patsy nestled under the soft sealskin, with a content akin to rapture in his great, starry blue eyes.

Nan had come, the lost angel of the household, the little fireside fairy, who could

bring warmth and comfort and light even to a hearth like this.

Nan had come! Too weak to speak his happiness, Patsy lay on his ragged pillow, following the busy little figure with a gaze that said more than words. The plaint was hushed upon his lips, the fever-light had died in his eyes, for Nan had come. Patsy asked nothing more.

An hour passed, another, and still Dad did not return. Nan had rubbed Patsy's little wasted limbs, bathed his burning head, until he had fallen under the old soothing touch into a quiet sleep. Tired little Dave was dozing by the fire, that filled the room with cheery light. The queer old bits of shakly furniture that successive tenants had left in their temporary shelter cast ghostly shadows in the corners. Oh, how lonely it was, how gloomy and lonely and dreadful, after Oakhurst—Nan thought of the library, with its great glowing fire, the drawn curtains, the soft lamplight, the

cushion at Uncle Jack's feet, the kind hand playing with her curls—all gone, gone forever! Uncle Jack's thunderous tones echoed in poor Nan's ears as she recalled the dreadful scene.

Ah, she could not think of it now; she dared not; her heart would break. It had all been a beautiful dream, and she was awake again, and back; back in the old life, with its old cares, and burdens and griefs and sorrows; back with her little face pressed to the cracked window-pane watching for Dad—Dad who had been three hours gone now. Surely it was time for him to be home.

It was snowing without. The gray clouds of the evening had given up their burden, and the storm had come with the night—a storm that seemed rising each moment into fiercer strength. Louder and louder swelled its voice, the wind wailed through the broken windows and shrieked down the tottering chimney and rattled the swinging doors of the old house, as if a horde of evil spirits

were holding revel there. Nan put another log on the fire, and tried to warm her chilling heart at the blaze. Oh, would Dad never come?

Wilder and wilder grew the storm; the house shook in its fury; the snow came whirling in under the shrunken doors; the bricks from the western gable end fell with a thunderous crash that startled Patsy and Dave in terror from their sleep.

“Nan, Nan, oh, what is it, Nan?”

“Only the storm, Patsy,” she murmured, trying to steady her own trembling voice. “Don’t be frightened. I am here to take care of you.”

“And Dad! Has he come, Nan? Has he brought me an orange? Oh, I want an orange so bad, Nan.”

“Dad hasn’t come yet,” she faltered, “but he will come soon now, Patsy, very soon; and he will bring nice milk and tea and sugar, and sweet oranges.”

“No, he won’t,” interrupted Dave, shrilly.

“Don’t you count on Dad doing all that, Nan. He has gone to the store, and he will get drunk and forget all about us. He won’t come back to bring us nothing, Nan—I know.”

## CHAPTER X.

### TRIED AND TRUE.

AND Davy proved a true prophet, for Dad did not come.

All through that dreadful night, with the storm raging in fierce fury, the crazy old house shaking and rattling in the blasts, Nan, wide-eyed with fright and anxiety, kept watch, feeding the fire that was the children's only hope of safety from the deadly cold, soothing Patsy's feverish terrors, bathing his aching limbs, rousing Davy's boyish courage, cheering both of the children with the wonderful stories of Oakhurst and all that she had learned there, until they grew quiet and confident again at her words.

"Snuggle up there in the bed beside Patsy, now, Dave, and go to sleep. My coat will

keep you both warm. Dad is snow-bound, but he will be here in the morning."

"No, he won't," answered Davy, shaking his head with doleful prescience. "When Dad gets drunk, he don't go nowhere to do nothing. He just sleeps and snores. And the roads will be snowed up, and there ain't no house for a mile; and nobody knows we are here, fur Dad is sneaking the rent; and we will all freeze!"

"Oh, no, no. Just wait until morning, and you'll see things will be all right," said Nan, cheerily, though her own heart sank as she felt how much truth there might be in Davy's forebodings.

And when at last the dull gray morning broke there was little to encourage hope.

All without was a white, blinding blur of sweeping drifts, and falling snow. Doors and windows were blocked hopelessly, for the old house stood on an angle that caught the full fury of the storm. And the last log was nearly burned; a scant sack of meal was

the children's only food; even the well, frozen and snow-covered, was beyond their reach. Nan, who only yesterday had dined on oysters and turkey and Spanish cream, was trembling with weakness and hunger and cold.

"Dad ain't coming. I told you he wasn't coming," wailed Dave, as he rubbed his eyes and tumbled out of bed, to survey the dismal scene.

"O Dave! Dave, I don't believe he is. What shall we do? Oh, what shall we do?" And for one moment Uncle Jack's little girl, softened a bit, perhaps, by love and luxury, worn out by a night of fear and watching, buried her face in her hands, before the dying embers of the fire, and sobbed despairingly.

"Nan, Nan," came a piteous, quavering little cry from Patsy's pallet, "O Nan! don't let us die. Don't let us freeze. Oh, take care of us, Nan."

"I will, I will!"

Ah, it was the self-reliant, self-forgetting little "Nan Nobody" of old that started up at that helpless cry.

"O dear Father in heaven! help me, and I will. Don't cry, Davy. Don't cry, Patsy boy. Your old Nan is here to take care of you, and she will, Patsy—she will!"

And then it was our little "Nan Nobody" showed that in the old, hard life she had learned lessons that neither Uncle Jack's globe nor Miss Darrell's books could teach. Never was shipwrecked mariner more helpless than this little heroine; for, stranded in an old, shaking house on a white, storm-swept, pathless desert, far from all human sight and reach, with two trembling little ones clinging to her, Nan had fear and cold and hunger, aye, and death itself to fight.

\* \* \* \* \*

For three hours after Nan's departure Uncle Jack had tramped his library in a towering rage, then slowly his passion began to cool.

Perhaps there was something softening in the sight of Nan's glove upon the table, of the globe, still traced by her uncertain pencil, of the little hassock he had kicked away from his chair in the first heat of his wrath.

“The little fool—the little, stubborn, ungrateful fool—to cling to those lowlived Farleys after all I had said to her about them; to turn from *me*, from her own flesh and blood, to a set of vulgar beggars that had made her their drudge and slave! That governess of Lambert's was right when she said nothing would raise a child from degrading associations.”

And then, somehow, the picture of Nan's face rose before Uncle Jack, and his big heart gave such a throb of tenderness that it almost took away his breath.

“I believe she loved the little beggar, actually *loved* him,” he puffed, irritably. “And she had promised his mother to take care of him, she said. Promise, indeed! A nice

promise to put on a poor little innocent heart and soul. She will be back to-morrow, I suppose. By George, no! She shan't stay in that beggar's hole another hour," continued Uncle Jack, quite forgetting he had just banished Nan eternally from his heart and home. "I'll go after her to-night."

"Mat!" he cried to his old shipmate, who was returning from the stable in happy unconsciousness of all that had occurred in the box-bordered garden path, "tell Con to harness up the roans to the sleigh. I am going—"

And hot-headed Uncle Jack suddenly paused, unable to complete his sentence. Where was he going? Where had Nan gone? In the fierce flood of his anger all thought of these questions had been swept away. Where would he find the little girl whom he had driven from him with harsh, cruel words? Not at the old home, for she had told him the Farleys had moved away.

“I wouldn’t go far, sir, even with the roans,” said Mat. “There’s a bank of clouds driving down from the north that manes storm. I’ve just towld the men to house all the craythurs for the night, for I’m thinking it’s the blizzard that was forecast that is coming down on us.”

A blizzard! The Captain knew his old shipmate’s weather wisdom. A blizzard, and his little Nan off with a half drunken old fool, he knew not where! In a moment he was out bare-headed on the portico scanning the threatening skies.

“Have the roans harnessed,” he repeated. “I must go for Nan. That old fool Farley has been here with some story about a dying child, and she has gone with him.”

“Gone! Miss Nan gone!” repeated Mat, in bewilderment. “Shure, all the horses is in, sir, and the carriages and sleighs.”

“Aye, aye, I know—I know,” said the Captain, hoarsely. “I lost my temper, Mat. It maddened me to see the way she clung to

those Farley beggars. I told her she might go, and stay forever."

"God forgive you, Captain. Shure, you must have been aither mad or dhrunk, to fling such words at a tender little craythur like that. And she has gone, ye say, gone ye don't know how or where? Murther, murther! why wasn't I to the fore? I'd have gone with her if I had to beg from door to door for the rest of my life!"

"She has only gone to see the dying child, you fool," said the Captain, angry at his own fears. "Have the roans harnessed, and we'll bring her home to-night. Young Farley is in the prison, and can tell us where his father lives, I suppose. Quick, man, quick, it is growing late!"

But though the roans sped swiftly over the darkening roads, it was to no purpose. The warden of the prison could only tell Captain Leighton that young Farley's term had expired two days ago, and, with the ticket which the Captain had so kindly pro-

cured for him in his pocket, he had left for New York, presumably to sail on the next steamer for Australia.

“The Farley girl was in town some weeks ago,” said the Captain, remembering the interview at the Fair. “We must find her, Mat, if we can.” And again the sturdy roans sped on through the deepening dusk and gathering storm to the town, where they were housed in the livery stable, while Uncle Jack and Mat scoured streets and byways in a search for Milly Farley. They traced her at last to a second-rate tailoring establishment, where a sharp-faced forewoman informed them that she had been dismissed for “sassiness,” and joined a theatrical company that had taken her out West.

Through the storm now raging in all its fury the searchers made their way back to the hotel. It was well-nigh impossible to return to Oakhurst to-night. But there was no sleep for Uncle Jack. The tide of tenderness and remorse had set in, and Uncle

Jack's heart was tossing in its waves like a rudderless ship adrift. Where was she, his little, bright, loving Nan, this awful night? To what wretched shelter had he driven her? Perhaps even she had been caught out in this fearful storm. And when the leaden-hued day came with its wild blur of drift and sleet, with its rumors of want and woe and disaster on every side, Uncle Jack's anxiety grew into desperation. All roads were blocked, all traffic stopped. Stories came of men and horses lost in snow-drifts; of women found freezing by fireless hearths; of death and discomfort even in the palatial homes of the rich.

Uncle Jack and Mat, making their way through storm and drift in a vain search for the Farleys, found suffering enough to empty their pockets and fill their hearts with fear and dread, but no sign of Dad or the lost Nan.

It was not until the morning of the second day that Mat, who had been out on a restless

tramp, came back to the Captain, white-faced and evidently shaken with excitement.

"I met a countryman below, sir. He is just in, afther nearly freezing to death on the road. He says he lent a sleigh, Tuesday, to an ould man named Farley."

"Where, where? What are you stopping for, man? Tell me all, quick!" cried Uncle Jack.

"Shure, the sleigh was found in a drift this morning, sir, and the ould man—dead."

"And the child!" gasped Uncle Jack. "My little girl—my little Nan!"

"Aisy, sir, aisy," said Mat, anxiously, for the look in the Captain's face frightened him. "There was no sign of the little girl, sir, none at all. But the man says that Farley lived in an ould rookery of a place on the Ridge Road, where he had two bits of boys. And—"

"Let us go there—let us go, Mat," said Uncle Jack, rallying to this gleam of hope.

“If we can, sir—if we can,” said Mat; “but, God help us, the man says the drifts are six feet high atwixt here and there.”

“We will go if they are twenty feet,” said Uncle Jack, desperately. “Order out the roans, man, and relays, laborers, snow-plows—anything. I must cut my way to that house if it costs every dollar I have in the world.”

And though it took six pairs of horses and a dozen stout men to break a way through the blocked roads and the mountainous drifts, it was done at last, and the rescuing party reached the hill, where, roofless and windowless, the old house stood, buried to the second story in snow.

“God help us,” said Mat, “no human craythur could have lived these two days there.”

“Aye, look—look!” said Uncle Jack, pointing to a faint spiral of smoke floating from a broken chimney. “In, my men. Clear a way in!”

And in a moment the great drifts were forced, the door burst open, and Uncle Jack, white with the awful fear of what might meet his eye, stood on the threshold of the low, smoke-blackened room.

For a moment he paused, speechless with emotion, with amazement, for a royal fire blazed upon the big hearth. Chairs, table-legs, bed slats, everything combustible within reach, fed the cheery, leaping flames. Snuggled up in a pallet near by, and covered by a rich sealskin, slept two puny, little, pale-faced boys. An ash-cake was baking on a bed of raked embers, a pot of gruel simmering over the blaze, and a bucket of snow melting into drinking-water was before the hearth.

And there, in the glow of the firelight, with tangled hair and smudged face, and brave little hands bruised and blackened by unaccustomed work, overcome at last by weariness and watching, sat Nan, sleeping.

“Nan! Nan!” She was too tired to

start even at the dear familiar call. She roused only to find herself clasped again to Uncle Jack's big heart, to feel hot tears upon her cheek, to hear broken words of love and thankfulness breathed above her.

"O Uncle Jack! dear Uncle Jack, I am so glad—so glad," she sobbed, the long-strained nerves giving way at last. "Oh, surely God told you where to find us, Uncle Jack; for the meal is nearly gone, and I've just split up the last chair. O Uncle Jack! forgive me. Patsy and Dave would have died if I had not come. Forgive me, Uncle Jack, and take me home."

"Forgive you!" repeated Uncle Jack, huskily. "Forgive you, Nan! I am a hot-headed old fool, that ought to be down on my knees begging your pardon, my own brave little girl. Come home to me, and bring a whole ship's crew of Patsies, if you please. I'll take care of them all—all, Nan, for your sake."

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And Uncle Jack was as good as his word. There was a happy Christmas after all, at Oakhurst, and the big Christmas tree rose in the hall laden with gifts for old and young, rich and poor. And the two milk-white ponies foretold by Mat came trotting from Santa Claus Land, drawing the prettiest little phaeton ever made for an uncle's pet. Davy, in a brand-new suit of clothes, sampled plum-cake and ice-cream for the first time in his life, while from a soft-cushioned couch in the conservatory Patsy looked out upon the bewildering scene, with blue eyes shining like stars.

"And I'm going to stay here always?" he whispered to Nan. "I ain't ever going to be turned out?"

"Never, Patsy! You are my own little brother now, and Uncle Jack is going to let me take care of you always. And the doctor says he thinks he can make you well and strong, so you can play and run and jump like other boys. O Patsy! isn't it all beau-

tiful? You must say every night and morning, 'God bless Uncle Jack.' "

"I will," said Patsy. "And I'll say something else, Nan," he added, putting his thin little arms around her neck. "I say it all the time. It's 'God bless Nan—dear Nan—good Nan—my own Nan Nobody.' "

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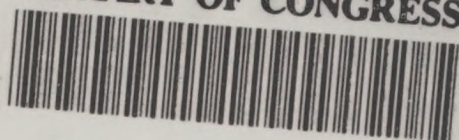








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